DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 459 014 RC 023 196

AUTHOR	Sampson-Cordle, Alice Vera
TITLE	Exploring the Relationship between a Small Rural School in Northeast Georgia and Its Community: An Image-Based Study Using Participant-Produced Photographs.
PUB DATE	2001-00-00
NOTE	411p.; Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Georgia. Photographs may not reproduce adequately.
PUB TYPE	Dissertations/Theses - Doctoral Dissertations (041)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC17 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Case Studies; *Community Relations; Community Study; Elementary Secondary Education; Geographic Isolation; Local History; *Photographs; Qualitative Research; *Rural Schools; Rural Sociology; *School Community Relationship; Small Schools; Small Towns; Social Capital; *Values
IDENTIFIERS	*Rural Culture

ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between a small rural school in northeast Georgia and its surrounding community. Three teachers, two community members, and three students used cameras to collect data related to their perceptions of the school-community relationship. They created photographs, then wrote about their photos, and finally, held the photos in their hands as they discussed their meanings with the researcher. Findings indicate that the relationship between school and community is defined by frequent interactions among kin, neighbors, and community members that permeate the school and community. Community members reinforce the values of the community and teach the rules for conduct to young and new members. Often this is done at school by modeling values and participating in activities that involve interactions between school and community. Participants provided examples of methods for maintaining community cohesion. They also provided examples of how a common will can create barriers to outsiders or those who do not conform to the community's social structure. Participants provided a vision for the future of the school-community relationship in which the old school auditorium is reclaimed and a new media center is built. These could be places where insiders and outsiders in the community meet, discuss, and consider what each has to offer the community. Increased interactions will increase social capital and strengthen the school-community relationship. Appendices present research materials, including examples of photofeedback and photoessays. (Contains 104 references and numerous photographs.) (TD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 459 014

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A SMALL RURAL SCHOOL IN NORTHEAST GEORGIA AND ITS COMMUNITY: AN IMAGE-BASED STUDY USING PARTICIPANT-PRODUCED PHOTOGRAPHS

by

ALICE VERA SAMPSON-CORDLE

BSED, The University of Georgia, 1988
MED, The University of Georgia, 1995

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the
Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Alice V.
Sampson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

ATHENS, GEORGIA
2001

RC 023196

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ALICE VERA SAMPSON-CORDLE
Exploring the Relationship Between a Small Rural School in Northeast Georgia and Its Community: An Image-Based Study Using Participant-Produced Photographs
(Under the Direction of PRISCILLA ELIZABETH PATE)

Close to half of the schools in the United States are located in rural areas and small towns. Economies-of-scale, via school consolidation, continues to be the dominant reform effort particular to rural education. The assumption is often made that through the centralization of resources, large rural schools are more efficient than smaller schools. But, some rural scholars now challenge the notion of just what constitutes "efficiency." In addition, small rural schools not facing immediate consolidation are often held to standards and uniform practices that may not make sense in light of its lack of resources, isolation, and organization: this "one best fit" reform ignores the unique attributes, concerns, and community attached to rural schools.

The purpose of this study was to examine the influences, identifications, and interactions between a small rural school and its surrounding community. Through the employment of image-based research and the examination of local demographics and historical and local documents, I have attempted to describe the relationship between a small rural K-12 unit school and its community so that stakeholders and policymakers may better understand the impact extrinsic and sweeping reform policies may have on small rural schools and their communities. Data include photographs, photofeedback, and photointerviewing responses. Through the exploration of the connections between a small, rural school and its community, I present a descriptive picture of rural education in a particular setting.

Three sets of findings are presented for this study. First is a story of Woody Gap School. Next is the participants' photoessays created from a within-case analysis of participant data, organized as themes. The last set is the themes created from a cross-case analysis of these photoessays, presented in two sections: common themes and individual responses. Some themes that emerged from this data are Kinship Connections, Kinship-Like Connections, Outsiders and Rules for Conduct, Exclusivity, Involvement in the

Community, The Chair Brigade, Expectations of Community, Self-sufficiency and Tenacity, Old Habits, Community Support of School, Activities and Traditions, and Mutual Reliance. A discussion of the findings considers themes within the context of Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft* and society *Gesellschaft* continuum and Coleman's discussion of intergenerational closure.

INDEX WORDS: Rural education, Rural schools, School and Community, Georgia rural schools, K-12 schools, School size, Intergenerational closure, Image-Based research, Photoessay, Photoelicitation, Photofeedback, Photointerviewing, Participant-produced photographs

© 2001
Alice Vera Sampson-Cordle
All Rights Reserved

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A SMALL RURAL SCHOOL IN NORTHEAST GEORGIA AND ITS COMMUNITY: AN IMAGE-BASED STUDY USING PARTICIPANT-PRODUCED PHOTOGRAPHS

by

ALICE VERA SAMPSON-CORDLE

Approved:

P. Elizabeth Pate

Major Professor

3/19/01

Date

Approved:

Dean of the Graduate School

Date

DEDICATION

This dissertation is first dedicated to my husband, Joel, my best friend and the love of my life. I would not have had the courage to embark on such a project as this without his loving smile, keen ear, undivided attention, and great cooking. I can't imagine sharing life's wonderful adventures with anyone else.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my son, Asa, an old soul who was always willing to take the time to lend an ear whenever I needed a sounding board. He forever encouraged me to press on whenever fatigue and lack of focus threatened to derail my progress. I am proud of his own hard work and dedication to his personal and professional goals.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to the study's participants and members of Woody Gap School and the unincorporated town of Suches, Georgia. All whom I met welcomed me into their school, shops, and homes with open arms and open minds. There, in the "Valley Above the Clouds," I found a magical place, where even on the coldest day I was warmed by kindness.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many wonderful people lent a helping hand along my way to completing this project. I am grateful to all of my family and friends for their unwavering support and their interest in my progress. In the first place, I must thank my nephew Stephen for sending me "Flat Stanley": he led me to Woody Gap School. A special thank-you to my sisters, Mary and Susan, who were always willing to take time out of their busy schedules to be there for me, and to my mother, for her love and for always allowing us kids to read at the dinner table. I thank my other parents, Mattie and Nub for their love and support. Thanks to Joan and Billy for checking in on a regular basis and to Charlie-Chuck-Sam for the e-pats on the back. Thanks to Anne for tolerating all those times I showed up at her door to vent.

Within the College of Education, I found encouragement and guidance from many: Dr. Jo Beth Allen, Dr. Jeri Benson, Dr. Lynn Bryan, Dr. Carl Glickman, Dr. John Dayton, Dr. Michael Padilla, Dr. Lynne Schrum, and Dr. Bettie St. Pierre. The Elementary Education Department was my second home, and my "family" there always gave generously of their advice and their reading libraries: Dr. Martha Alexsaht-Snider, Ms. Stephanie Bales, Ms. Joyce Brown, Dr. Rachel Davis, Dr. Denise Muth Glynn, Dr. Laurie Hart, Dr. Brenda Manning, Dr. Jim McLaughlin, Dr. Penny Oldfather, Dr. Beverly Payne, Dr. Jack Powell, Dr. Judy Reiff, Dr. George Stanic, and Ms. Frieda Thornton.

I must acknowledge the support of the department's graduate assistants, housed in the heart of the fourth floor. Like cadets at an academic boot camp, we commiserated during the tough times and celebrated each other's victories during the good times. Our breakfasts and sharetime at the Grill always left me feeling energized. Dr. Page Campbell, Dr. Ruth Ference, Dr. Gert Nesin, soon-to-be-Dr. Carol Pearson, and Dr. Suzanne McCotter continue to be my heroes. Beth, Connie, Dayna, Holly, Hoon, Rick,

Sherrie, and Stacey were always there for me and made my time in graduate school a special one. I also want to thank all the students and teachers in our graduate seminars, especially those who made it such a positive experience. The laughter found there was always therapeutic. I am so very proud to acknowledge those undergraduate students and student teachers that I met and who taught me so much. They are why I have chosen teacher education for my next career.

Many thanks to all of the new friends I have made in my new home in Dahlonega, Georgia. You have all been so gracious and encouraging! Thanks, Dr. Susan Gannaway.

I want to express my deep appreciation to The League of Professional Schools and Dr. Frances Hensley, one of my committee members. She gave me so many opportunities to be with other rural educators and researchers, to travel, and to think. What fun we had traveling the rural roads of South Georgia! She is an inspiration and a friend. Thank you to Dr. John Lounsbury, the "father" of the middle school movement who gave of his time and experience to enlighten our middle school education students and their instructors. I remain in awe of his energy and his dedication to the middle school movement.

I am so very grateful to my committee members, Dr. Shawn Glynn, Dr. Frances Hensley, Dr. David Jackson, Dr. Randi Stanulis, and Dr. Deborah Tippins, for their positive feedback and constructive criticism and for encouraging me to experiment with unorthodox data collection methods. I always looked forward to our meetings and discussions and left them energized and ready to go to work.

Last, but most certainly not least, I thank Dr. Gert Nesin and Dr. Elizabeth Pate. Thanks to cohort pal Gert for her guidance, her friendship, her wisdom, her generosity, and her positive attitude. She is someone who always has her priorities straight in a seemingly complex world, and one cannot help but be changed for the better having known her!

I need to express a very special thank-you to my major professor, Elizabeth. She is the one responsible for leading me to the first step on this journey. As my mentor, advisor, and friend, she fed me, loaned me her car, shared her computer, encouraged my thinking, and edited my writing. When I was stuck, she got the wheels turning again. She always opened her office and her home to me (thanks, Steve and Mike!), and always assured me that I was a capable person. She will always have my undying gratitude, love, and respect, thank you.

And to anyone I might have left out, thanks to you for your part in this dance!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS v

LIST OF TABLES xi

LIST OF FIGURES xii

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION 1

Need for the Study 2

Purpose of the Study 3

Research Questions 3

Definitions 4

Organization of the Remainder of this Dissertation 7

2 REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE 9

Rural Schools 10

The Rural School Consolidation Movement 13

Small Rural Schools 15

Community 17

The Rural Community School Versus Nation-building 22

3 METHODOLOGY 25

Research Design 25

Image-Based Research 26

Pilot Studies 32

Research Setting ... 36
Research Participants ... 38
Data Collection and Analysis ... 43
Contextualizing Woody Gap School and the Suches Community ... 53
Conclusion ... 55
4 A STORY OF WOODY GAP ... 57
Beginnings ... 58
The Valley above the Clouds ... 68
The Little Rock School House ... 77
School and Community ... 87
5 WITHIN-CASE FINDINGS ... 101
Eight Photoessays ... 103
Charlie ... 103
Jim ... 123
Mary ... 148
Hank ... 170
Ryan ... 195
Matt ... 211
Joy ... 226
Henry ... 232
Summary of the Findings ... 244
6 CROSS-CASE FINDINGS ... 246
Common Themes ... 247
Individual Themes ... 292
Summary of Chapter ... 315
7 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS ... 317
Summary of the Study ... 317
Discussion of Findings ... 324

Discussion of the Research Methodology 340
Researcher Biases 354
Suggestions for Future Research 356
A Conversation at the General Store: Broader Implications 359
Conclusion 360
REFERENCES 362

APPENDICES

A MAP OF THE SUCHES AREA 371
B PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORMS 373
C INSTRUCTIONS FOR PHOTOFEEDBACK 379
D EXAMPLE OF PHOTOFEEDBACK 381
E PHOTOINTERVIEW SCRIPT 383
F EXAMPLE OF A PRIVATE PHOTOESSAY 385
G THEMATIC ORGANIZER 394

LIST OF TABLES

Page

1 Stages for Data Collection 44

2 Themes for Question 1 104

3 Themes for Question 2 105

4 Responses for Question 3 105

5 Common Themes 247

6 Individual Themes and Responses 292

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

1 Beginnings Collage, Part 1 59

2 Beginnings Collage, Part 2 60

3 The Valley Above the Clouds Collage, Part 1 70

4 The Valley Above the Clouds Collage, Part 2 71

5 The Valley Above the Clouds Collage, Part 3 72

6 The Valley Above the Clouds Collage, Part 4 73

7 The Little Rock School House Collage, Part 1 80

8 The Little Rock School House Collage, Part 2 81

9 The Little Rock School House Collage, Part 3 82

10 The Little Rock School House Collage, Part 4 83

11 School and Community Collage, Part 1 90

12 School and Community Collage, Part 2 91

13 Graduation Night Collage, Part 1 98

14 Graduation Night Collage, Part 2 99

15 Graduation Night Collage, Part 3 100

16 Kinship Connections Collage 249

17 Kinship-Like Connections Collage 253

18 Outsiders and Rules for Conduct Collage 259

19 Exclusivity Collage 267

20 Involvement in Community Collage 271

21 Community Support of the School Collage 275

22 Activities and Traditions Collage 281

23 Mutual Reliance Collage, Part 1 286

24 Mutual Reliance Collage, Part 2 287

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Today over one third of Georgia's school children are educated in a rural setting (Boatright & Bachtel, 1998). And, because the state of Georgia has used school consolidation as a system of reform so pervasively, only 8% of its elementary student population attend schools with enrollments under 350 and only 17% of its secondary students attend schools with numbers under 900 (Rural Challenge, 1999). When communities are deprived of their local schools, they often wither as they lose the heart of their social structure--their local meeting space, town hall, activity center, night school, sports arena, performance hall, and nursery. Community members are then deprived of "intergenerational closure," a social structure that is "an extended network of kinship, friendship, and work relations that pervades...the community" (Coleman, 1987, p.182). Through communication and support, members take it upon themselves to demonstrate and maintain those values embraced by the community. A loss of the community school means that students are bused to distant campuses that are often large and impersonal, making it difficult for parents and community members to be active participants and informed partners in their community's education.

Research has begun to question whether there is any true economic or social benefit to an economies-of-scale arrangement of schooling, where schools are organized under a banner of "bigger is better" and are assumed to be more easily managed, efficient to operate and cost effective.

Additionally, rural community resources are sparse and populations are continuously declining (Boatright & Bachtel, 1998). Rural schools must respond to the ever-increasing demands and challenges of a rapidly changing job market. Consequently, they must stretch their already extremely limited resources to capacity, as they struggle to provide each child with a quality education.

Perhaps by exploring a small rural school setting in Georgia, we can glimpse community connections and attachments between schools and their surrounding neighborhoods; how they are fostered to create positive and productive schooling experiences; and consider how school size impacts the school experience and the school-community relationship.

Need for the Study

Close to half of the schools in the United States are located in rural areas and small towns (Harmon, 1997). Yet, when it comes to initiating or reporting school change, most reform research and initiatives focus on urban school settings. Although obstacles to effective delivery of education are found in rural districts, they are not as widely acknowledged as problems found in nonrural settings. It may be that the plight of urban schools and their struggles are more visible to the public eye via media and print, than are the conditions in rural schools (University of the State of New York [USNY], 1992).

Meanwhile, economies-of-scale, via school consolidation, continues to be the dominant reform effort particular to rural education (DeYoung, 1994; Fanning, 1995; Howley, 1996; 1997a; 1997b; Natchtigal, 1982; Theobald, 1991). The assumption is often made by rural school districts and other state agencies that through the centralization of their resources, large rural schools are better able to combat the lack of resources experienced by small rural schools, and, therefore, are more efficient. But some rural scholars are challenging the notion of just what constitutes "efficiency." For example, researchers (Howley & Bickel, 1999) recently involved in a series of studies called *The Matthew Project*, examined student achievement levels in four states, Georgia, Montana, Ohio, and Texas, and found that the academic success of those students living in lower socio-economic status households decreased as school size increased. The press release (Rural Challenge, 1999) announcing the findings of their study states

> At all grade levels and in all subject areas, the link between SES and student achievement is weaker in smaller schools than in larger schools. In larger schools, poverty accounted for between 49% and 79% (on average 67%) of the variance in

> average achievement scores among the schools, depending on the grade level and subject matter. (p. 8)

Even when a small, rural school is not facing immediate consolidation, it is often held to standards and uniform practices that may not make sense in light of its resources, settings, isolation, and organization. Purposes for reform in urban or suburban schools may be extremely different from those of rural schools, which are quite diverse among rural settings, therefore, the "one best fit" approach, which ignores the unique attributes, concerns, and community attached to rural schools, may not work and when applied, may do harm.

In his piece, *How to Make Rural Education Research Rural: An Essay at Practical Advice*, Howley (1997a) points out that "rural places in the contemporary world may suffer more than other places from the lack of research and from the misguided effort to build up widely applicable and reliable procedures for school improvement" (p. 131). DeYoung (1994) argues that most ethnographic research on rural schools and their communities has focused on ethnicity and that "significant scholarship on rural schools and rural school cultures per se remains amazingly underdeveloped" (p. 2). Through the exploration of possible connections between a small, rural school and its community, I hope to present a descriptive picture of rural education in a particular setting.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe the types of influences, identities, and interactions that characterize the relationship between a small rural school and its surrounding community. Through the employment of photoessay, photofeedback, and photoelicitation, and through the examination of local demographics and historical documents, I have attempted to document aspects of the relationship of this small rural K-12 unit school and its community.

Research Questions

It can be tempting for one to romanticize the idea of rural schooling when the setting is a quaint small school situated in the idyllic mountains of Appalachia. As an educator who has worked in a rural school setting for several years, I can counter many romantic notions with more pragmatic observed and lived accounts from the rural setting. Still, I have never taught in a rural system where all the community members it served lived in the community where the school was located or where the school was considered to be small (less than 400 enrollment). It is this proximity of a community to a small school setting that brought me to explore the school-community relationship of a small school while most rural children in Georgia are assigned to larger campuses, removed from the communities in which they live.

The general question underlying research for this dissertation study is "What is the relationship between a small, rural school in Northeast Georgia and its surrounding community?" Within the context of this question are several related questions:

1. What is the history of the relationship between this small rural school and its surrounding community?
2. How do educators, students, and community members conceptualize the relationship between this small rural school and its surrounding community?
3. What kinds of interactions do educators, students, and community members have between this small rural school and its surrounding community?
4. How do educators, students, and community members envision the future for the relationship between this school and its community?

Definitions

So as to present a clearer understanding of the issues around rural schooling, these definitions will be applied whenever any of the following terms are used in the study:

Rural

What does it mean to call a school a *rural* school? What differentiates a rural school from a nonrural school? The line between these two groups is not easily drawn. Joyce Stern (in USNY, 1992) of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) points to the abounding diversity of definitions for *rural* as a complicating factor for research on rural education. The USNY (1992) study on rural education illustrates a problem with these diverse definitions:

> Many *urban* states with large populations have greater numbers of rural schools and students than significantly *rural* states. New York ranks 44th in the percentage of schools statewide which are rural (13.5 %) yet ranks 18th when considering the number of rural schools (526). New York with over 238,000 rural students ranks 6th nationally for total rural student enrollment. (p. 6)

Consider the four government agency definitions of *rural* from the U. S. Bureau of the Census, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (ERS), and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) listed in Khattri, Riley, and Kane (1997): The Census Bureau definition is based on population number and density in an area. A population in an area with less than 2,500 people is defined as rural. The same definition comes from the OMB with the addition of a designation of *metro* to areas that have a city with 50,000 or more residents, and *nonmetro* to counties without a city with at least 50,000 residents. The ERS and the NCES use codes to place land areas into categories, running them along an urban-rural continuum. Outside of being a large city, the placement of an area on this spectrum depends on how far or close an area may be to the next large city or town.

Because of the variance in definitions, different agencies report different statistics when tallying what areas are *rural*. For example, the Census Bureau "classifies 97% of total land area as rural; the OMB, on the other hand,...classifies 84% of the land as nonmetropolitan....However, many counties designated *metro* can have substantial portions of rural area just beyond city limits" (Khattri et al., 1997, p. 80).

The U. S. Department of Education defines *rural* as areas with population centers under 2,500 or "open countryside" (National Association of State Boards of Education [NASBE], 1996, p. 3). These simplistic definitions can be misleading. Nachtigal (1982) points out that "by some standards, the largest population centers in North Dakota might be considered rural....On the other hand, relatively small population centers close to major metropolitan areas would likely be quite urban in nature, with residents commuting to urban jobs and adopting urban ways" (p. 269). He feels that *isolation* should be a characteristic. So does Stephens (1991) of the Appalachia Educational Laboratory. He suggests that, when accompanied with enrollment factors, measures of isolation can better identify rural areas. Forbes (in USNY, 1992) adds to the meaning of the characteristic *isolation* as a factor in defining rural. He states that "isolation can also be defined in terms of cultural and linguistic differences that divide people from each other.... [as well as] the value people place on education" (p. 5). This added dimension alerts one to the just how diverse rural settings can be and helps one to consider the complexities involved in discussing the education of rural school children.

For the purposes of this study, I apply the U. S. Department of Education definition of rural: "Rural areas are areas with population centers under 2,500 or open countryside" (NASBE, 1996, p.3), and extend it to include similar conditions of isolation that Nachtigal (1982), Stephens (1991), and Forbes (1992) consider in their definitions of "rural," as described above.

Small School

Based on Craig Howley's (1997b) discussion of school size, and for this study, small school is defined as a school with an enrollment of less than 400 students.

Intergenerational Closure

A social structure seen by Coleman (1987) as "an extended network of kinship, friendship, and work relations that pervades...the community" (p.182). Through communication and support, community members take it upon themselves to demonstrate and maintain those values embraced by the community; participants strive to be gatekeepers of the community and community values, and so, the watchdogs of its members.

Community

For this study, keeping in mind Merz's and Furman's (1997) "modern notions of geographic mobility, role specialization, choice, and the notion of equality of individuals"

(p. 32), I define "community" as a group of individuals whose members are in close proximity to each other (whether that closeness be due to family connectedness, geographic location, or through deliberate associations); has a social structure resembling intergenerational closure; and fosters, models, or explicitly teaches shared communal values and a sense of place.

School Reform

Tyack's and Cuban's (1995) definition of the concept reform is to the point: "When we speak of educational reforms, we mean planned efforts to change schools in order to correct perceived social and educational problems" (p. 4). Throughout this study, when the term "reform" is used, it is intended to convey this notion of "planned efforts" to "correct" perceived social and educational" woes, denoting a prescriptive approach to school change that emanates from external sources.

Organization of the Remainder of this Dissertation

Chapter 2 is a review of the pertinent literature. The first section of Chapter 2 examines the research and history of particular aspects of schooling in the rural setting important to this study: benefits and disadvantages, school consolidation, and small schools. The next section considers the literature around community. Finally, the theory of nation-building and its possible impact on school reform are presented.

Chapter 3 is a discussion of the research methodology: design, data collection, analysis, and representation, including definitions and descriptions of the process of using an image-based research approach for data collection and representation.

Chapter 4 attempts to contextualize the research setting for a better understanding of the findings of the study. Here, I present *a* story of Woody Gap School, using a variety of data sources. To better illustrate this story, I provide selected photographs from the 45 rolls of film taken by me during my stay at the school. This chapter addresses the first research question, "What is the history of the relationship between this small rural school and its surrounding community?"

Chapter 5 is a description and discussion of the within-case findings of the study. Data collected from and by participants are arranged in individual data themes that emerged from the photographs, voices, and writings of each of the teachers, students, and community members and represented as photoessays.

Chapter 6 is a description and discussion of the cross-case findings of the study. Data collected from and by participants are arranged in data themes that emerged from the photographs, voices, and writings of all of the teachers, students, and community members and represented as photoessays. These themes are organized and presented in two ways: by data that was found to be similar among participants and by data found to be different--distinctive to a particular participant.

Chapter 7 is a discussion and summary of the study and presents the implications of its findings for educational research and schooling theory and practice, particularly in the arenas of rural education and small schools and communities.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

In this section is a review of the literature informing the focus of this study: the relationship between a small rural school in Northeast Georgia and its surrounding community. In rural literature, researchers, theorists, and educators regularly debate the roles and effects of reform on rural schools and rural students. Most often these discussions center around 1) the unique needs and characteristics of rural schools, 2) school size and consolidation, 3) the role of rural community voice in the educational process, and 4) nation-building: the tension between the repercussions of and the need for externally imposed and economically-driven policy and mandates on schools. In reading the current and historical literature addressing the quality of education for rural citizens, it is becoming clear to me that concerns around communal uniqueness, school size, school consolidation, community voice, and external and economic policymaking are connected. The consideration of these issues has prompted me to question the purpose for mandated school consolidations and whether the resulting creation of uniformly-managed remote campuses encourages a disconnection between a community's students and the specialties and needs of the communities where students reside. Thinking about these issues has led me to wonder what an educative setting looks like when it is small, rural, and has been serving its community's residents for most of its existence. The purpose of this review is to provide an overview of the literature around the issues of rural schooling and community: the benefits and disadvantages of rural schooling, the history of the rural school consolidation movement, the benefits and disadvantages of small rural schools, and the role of community within the context of rural schooling.

Rural Schools

Rural schools can be found in the wilderness of Alaska, at the edge of a cotton field in South Georgia, or on the plains of Ohio. Discussing the diversity of settings found in rural education, Regents writing for the University of the State of New York (1992) suggest that "contrary to the stereotype of country life, a homogenous rural America does not exist" (p.10). However, there are common characteristics that allow one to understand that a rural school is not just a school located outside of an urban or suburban setting.

For example, most rural schools are survivors of at least one or two rounds of consolidation as evidenced by DeYoung's (1994) hypothesis that "virtually every school in the United States was a rural one prior to the industrial revolution" (p. 3). Many rural schools may still be housed in decades-old two-or-three storied brick buildings situated in the local town or down a country lane, or they may be in modern buildings with their classrooms arranged in the traditional "egg-crate" style, back-to-back, within graded halls or wings. More commonly, and as a result of local economizing, newer rural schools may be "central hubs" within counties, with large campuses and plenty of buffer space between the school and the adjacent highways or roads. To get to these schools, students living in remote or isolated areas or pockets may have to travel great distances each day, down dirt roads and lonely highways (Khattri, Riley, & Kane, 1997).

Benefits of Rural Schools

Keeping in mind the diversity found in rural schools across the country, there are positive aspects of rural schooling that may not be found in large inner-city or suburban schools. Many innovative practices now used by numerous metropolitan schools such as interdisciplinary studies, site-based management, peer-tutoring, nongraded classes, individualized instruction, and cross-age grouping originated in rural schools (Annenberg Rural Challenge, 1995; Seal & Harmon, 1995). In addition, positive influences on students' well-being may result from their attending rural schools. For example, in a four year study, Hedlund (1993) found that most of his participants liked living in a rural setting and going to a rural school. Many of the students mentioned having feelings of safety, connectedness, and intimacy associated with rural living and schooling. Miller (1995) stated that, "rural communities often reflect such valued norms as strong work ethics, concern for neighbors, low crime rates, environmental quality, and a community spirit that provides fertile ground for revitalization" (p. 163). These schools can and do reflect common community values and encourage frequent interactions among community members, school employees, students, and their families (Cotton, 1996; Maynard & Howley, 1997; University of the State of New York, 1992).

Disadvantages of Rural Schools

Not everything about rural education may be beneficial for student learning. Rural schools are often faced with challenges generated from within their communities, such as substance abuse, poverty, unemployment, and high dropout rates. In addition, limited resources due to a rural school's sparse economic base may impede its pursuit of academic and social goals (Appalachian Educational Laboratory, 1999; Tadlock, 1995). If a rural school also happens to be small, even fewer resources are available and higher expenditures per student are needed. Topography, logistics for parent participation, long bus rides, treacherous weather, isolation, loss of agribusinesses, fewer opportunities for cultural enrichment, "brain drain" or community flight by bright graduates and by teachers, and higher tax rates in proportion to earned income are factors that may limit rural schools as they seek to educate their students (Appalachian Educational Laboratory, 1999; Cotton, 1996; Fanning, 1995; Howley, 1996; Maynard & Howley, 1997; Raywid, 1999).

Along with, and in spite of, these looming clouds, rural schools are often important centers of support and activity for the communities to which they are traditionally tied (Fanning, 1995), but the school consolidation movement which began at the turn of the century and continues to be the most common rural education reform effort has resulted in fewer community schools, with more students finding themselves literally farther from their schools than ever. Increased distances in terms of personal power, involvement, and support may also be felt by the students, parents, and other community members. Reform efforts intended to create large, uniform, effectively managed schools may also encourage a disregard for the unique and communal aspects of small rural schools and the students' sense of place in their local community (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Howley, 1997a; Natchtigal, 1982).

Looking at the close connections and interactions among community members, families, students, and staff, Nachtigal (1982) likens the resulting pressures of community and family scrutiny of teachers to the time of the strict codes of social conduct once prescribed for school marms in the one-room school houses long ago: "Teachers in small communities continue to be more vulnerable to community pressures than those who teach in larger systems" (p. 9). Values perceived by the community to be in conflict with the teachers can be problematic. The superintendent and principal are also subject to local scrutiny, and the effectiveness of their work within the schools may suffer as a result. In addition, because there are fewer bureaucracies in rural school systems, the damage an ineffective or corrupt principal or superintendent can wreak on a school can be felt in short term. Scarcity of resources and a sparse tax base may limit programming, course offerings, and incentives for employee recruitment, which may in turn prevent a school district from providing a comparable education for its students.

Limited financial resources, due to few available tax dollars, may reflect conditions of high unemployment and poor standards of living for the community's families. Data varies as to the exact number of students attending rural schools while living in poverty, but the average appears to be approximately 25% (Helge, 1991; NASBE, 1996; USNY, 1992). Seal and Harmon (1995) reported that a child in a sparsely populated county is more likely to be from a poor family, become a high school dropout, and have parents who are unemployed and poorly educated, than a child from a more densely-populated county. For parents faced with scant job opportunities, there may be little incentive for them to see the benefit of completing school or in helping their children to set goals for academic success (Maynard and Howley, 1997). Consequently, few parents of rural students seek higher education. The Lippman Report (Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996) reported that only 18% of parents of rural eighth graders had a college education.

Rural schools and their communities must face and conquer many unique challenges; doing what Nachtigal (1982) calls "accepting rural reality" (p. 13). This uniqueness may prevent the successful application of a "one best system" for educational reform and school improvement. Instead, it may be that the distinctive needs of rural schools, such as the school in this study, are best met by state and federal agencies when they provide the resources and the guidance necessary for rural schools to build their own vision and model for schooling and reform. In order for reform initiatives and programs to be most effective, they may need to emanate from those that reform efforts will most affect: the members of the local community and its schools.

The Rural School Consolidation Movement

In 1820 the United States consisted of only 13 cities with a population of over 8,000 sprinkled among its 23 states. By 1860, the number of these size cities had increased to 141, creating critical problems for education along with the difficulties of accommodating rapid urbanization (Nachtigal, 1982). Efforts on behalf of education taken in large cities set the standards for education, leaving rural schools to fend for themselves:

> Convinced that within the techniques of industrialization--bigger is better, specialization, proper supervision--lies the secret for efficiency and effectiveness in education, reformers molded rural education into a likeness of urban education. Even before the twentieth century...efforts were made to systematize rural schools. (p.15)

In the 1890's the National Education Association Committee of Twelve on Rural Schools began to consolidate schools; a reform effort still very much in practice today. From 1939 to 1994, school districts decreased by over 100,000 in this country, and the number of elementary schools decreased by over 175,000 (NASBE, 1996). There are a number of reasons that encouraged the powers-that-be to use consolidation as a method of reform for rural schools:

> The century long movement to consolidate small, rural schools has been motivated by several factors, including economic theories of efficiency and economies of scale, notions of instructional effectiveness and measures of school quality, the needs of business and industry, and school reform agendas. (p. 5)

Theobald (1991) examined the Commission on Country Life by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1911. Overseeing a rural social reform effort like the antipoverty programs President Lyndon Johnson implemented for assisting Appalachia in the 1960s, this Commission was charged with the duties to improve rural school conditions. The commissioners prescribed two major reforms: "1) infuse a love of the countryside with an experience-based curriculum, and 2) consolidate country schools into one central location" (p. 21). These reforms were of the "new education" of the time, designed to combat recitation pedagogy, low graduation rates (only 25 % of rural students were completing the eighth grade in 1911), and the poor budget allotments found in rural school houses and districts (only $13 per year went to rural students compared with $28 per year spent on urban students) (Theobald, 1991).

At about the same time the Country Life Commission was focusing on rural education and reform, Ellwood P. Cubberly was also discussing the conditions of schooling in rural areas:

> Don't underestimate the problem of school reform, because the rural school is today in a state of arrested development, burdened by education traditions, lacking in effective supervision, controlled largely by rural people, who, too often, do not realize their own needs or the possibilities of rural education, and taught by teachers who, generally speaking, have but little comprehension of the rural-life problem. (1914, in Nachtigal, 1982, p. 16)

By implementing uniform regulations as a means for bringing opportunities to rural youth and by creating consolidation policies as a resource-conserving strategy, rural schools were beginning to be pushed into the model that existed in nonrural areas such as large towns, suburbs, and urban centers. Like many of the small schoolhouses built in the United States in the late 1930's, Woody Gap School is also a product of rural school consolidation. Its students left their five one-room church schools to attend the newly built school in Suches, a small, unincorporated town in Northeast Georgia. This school is now considered to be isolated and unique, yet subject to the many of the same external mandates and reforms as its state's other, much larger, surburban and urban schools.

Small Rural Schools

As discussed above, at the turn of the century, Theodore Roosevelt's Commission on Country Life sought to assist poor and isolated rural schools through advocating a reform that would tend to these schools' financial disparities and low attendance rates. The resulting reform effort was the consolidation of country schools into one central location (Theobald, 1991). One-room schoolhouses were "boxed" together, creating small schools equipped with uniform classrooms and site-based faculties. Eventually, many of these small schools were also collapsed together in the name of financial efficiency and effective instruction. Today, small schools on the American educational landscape are becoming increasingly rare, but they do exist, and are bolstered by the call of a growing number of rural education researchers who view small schools as preferable to large schools for the purpose of educating impoverished and isolated rural youth.

History of Small Schools

The role of small schools in education has its own history. In 1954, the Rocky Mountain Area Project for Small High Schools (RMAP) was formed as a response to the threat of consolidation. Embracing a "small is good" philosophy, citizens, school board members, and superintendents of schools in Colorado joined together to preserve their small schools. In addition to the RMAP project, other similar models advocating the preservation of small schools emerged: the Berea Program, the Alaska Rural School Project, the Rural Education Improvement Program of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and the Western States Small Schools Project (Nachtigal, 1982).

As a result of these movements, the late 1950s saw 22 states enact legislation to provide some form of supplemental funding for necessary existent, small, rural schools. In spite of these efforts to stem the tide, consolidation continued to dominate rural education reform. Today, consolidation continues to sweep away small, rural schools: the loss of farms and the downsizing of other agribusiness have resulted in the depletion of social and financial capital. Consequently, families and resources are driven to nonrural settings, and so, the temptation for school districts is to merge their county's small community schools (Nachtigal, in NASBE, 1996).

Benefits of Small Rural Schools

The result of consolidation policies in rural areas is the creation of more uniform administrative organizations and centralization in schools. As rural schools come to look more and more like their urban and suburban counterparts, communities, which may embody the unique cultural identity of its students and have looked to the schools to meet its needs in the past, become disenfranchised and are bypassed by rural education in the name of efficiency and reform.

It is logical to surmise that small schools are intimate places, providing more opportunities for teachers and students to know one another better. Most likely if the school is small, it is in an isolated setting as well, and its teachers are members of the students' community. In addition, there is research that suggests that small schools may be better suited for poor, at-risk students, while more affluent students may fare better in larger schools: the higher the socioeconomic status, the more likely the student will benefit from attending a large school (Friedkin & Necochea, 1988; Howley, 1996; Howley, 1997b; Howley & Bickel, 1999; Plecki, 1991). This is an important factor to consider when the consolidation of small schools is being contemplated by a school district and the community.

In her examination of studies concerning the affective and social benefits of attending small schools, Cotton (1996) concluded that the research favors small schools when it comes to student attitudes, personal and academic self-concepts, and sense of belonging. As Cotton notes, students attending small schools had higher levels of participation in extracurricular activities and in a greater variety. Attendance is higher and there are fewer reported social behavior disruptions. Cotton also found that teachers and administrators of small schools report that their students consistently express positive attitudes toward their work and collaborative efforts. As Raywid (1999) notes, students in small schools make more rapid progress toward graduation, behave better, and have fewer instances of major or minor infractions than do students in large, rural schools. These benefits are even more evident for disadvantaged students.

Possible Disadvantages of Small Rural Schools

A challenge to the small, rural school is what Fox (1980) calls the "diseconomies of scale": like very large schools, small schools cost more to run. Howley (1996) points out that "not only are small schools more expensive to maintain on a per-pupil basis, but impoverished communities confront problems unimaginable to many affluent communities, and they do so with fewer resources" (p. 3). Raywid (1999) agrees that on a cost-per-student enrolled basis, small schools are slightly more expensive. But when this amount is considered along with rates of graduation, they are less costly than either medium-sized or large schools. Woody Gap School is an example of such a small school. It is more expensive--per pupil--to run than its larger counterparts, yet it has high returns in terms of attendance (over 90% during the 1998-1999 school year) and standardized test scores (ranked first in the state of Georgia for high school graduation tests for the 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 school years), while 40% of its students participate in the state free or reduced lunch program (Georgia Department of Education, 2000).

Community

In education literature and research, the concept *community* is an ambiguous term likely to be found wherever discussions of schooling and society exist. Theoretical or practical literature discuss ways one can *build* community, *live in* a community; *create* community, *have* community, and *promote* community. Communities may be identified by geographic locations, private selections, public organizations, or genetic bonds. A community might be a family, a neighborhood, a school, a classroom, a group, a nation, or the world; forged as a result of politics, biology, economics, topographies, similar interests, or random groupings. Community can be a feeling, a sense of belonging, a particular view of place, a set of common experiences: all of which can be valued, experienced, shared, or shunned.

Some understandings of community are romantic and holistic, while some are practical and analytical. Haas and Nachtigal (1998) see community as "how we collectively create a story about our place. It is the narrative of who we are [and] how we all get along together" (p. 21). Writing on communities in contemporary rural America, poet and commentator Wendell Berry (1993) considers community to be "the commonwealth and common interests, commonly understood, of people living together in a place and wishing to continue to do so" (p. 120). On the other hand, Coleman (1987) and Miller (1991) warn that our concept of community can be so protective and narrow that some of its members may lose opportunities for self-expression and become isolated or discouraged.

Many researchers, scholars, and philosophers have written about the characteristics of community--or at least parts of community. But because it is plausible to think that community exists wherever two humans interact and because human interactions are dynamic and distinctive, it is probably not possible to present a clear and definitive explanation of community. Defining community is difficult because the idea of community lies in the eye of the beholder or, more to the point, the experience of its members.

Basics of Community: *Gemeinschaft*

In their discussions of community and schools, Martinez-Brawley (1990), Merz and Furman (1997), Rousseau (1991), and Sergiovanni (1994) lead us to Tönnies, a German sociologist born in 1855, and the development of his *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* continuum of social relationships. There being no direct English translation, the two terms are commonly thought of as meaning *community* and *society,* respectively. Tönnies used his *Gemeinschaft*/*Gesellschaft* continuum to discuss organizations of social relationships. On one end is the *Gemeinschaft*, the relationships of locale, kinship, and friendship; the mother-child connection representing the most *Gemeinschaft* relationship, next being the relationship between spouses and then among siblings. Social connections between family or tribe are ancient taken-for-granted arrangements, involving little choice by their members. On the other hand, and at the other end of Tönnies's continuum, *Gesellschaft* "represents the public world of commerce...and is organized to meet the demands of the marketplace. Relationships are generally voluntary, based on ...rational will, and functionally specific, that is, relating to a certain role or task...such as commercial trade" (Merz and Furman, 1997, p. 14). *Gesellschaft* has to do with work, skills, social mobility, and choice.

Returning to the concept of *Gemeinschaft*, Tönnies lists three types of community relationships: 1) blood, the strongest bind despite time and distance; 2) place, such as one's birthplace or a neighborhood; and 3) mind (e.g., friendship). This last *Gemeinschaft* is the least binding when it comes to lasting social connections, yet it "represents the truly human and supreme form of community" (Tönnies in Sergiovani, 1994, p. 6). Through community, people know a small circle of friends and family well and conduct economic, religious, and social business with the same members of their community throughout their lives (Martinez-Brawley, 1990; Merz and Furman, 1997).

Intergenerational Closure

Coleman (1987) carries Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft* into his discussion of *intergenerational closure*, a social structure he sees as "an extended network of kinship, friendship, and work relations that pervade...the community" (p.182). Through communication and support, community members take it upon themselves to be the gatekeepers of the community and its values and the watchdogs of its members. Coleman asserts that members of metropolitan areas may lose intergenerational closure if friends and relatives are dispersed throughout a large geographic community. Though, there are researchers (Boykin, Jagers, Ellison, & Albury, 1997; Jagers & Mock, 1995) who are exploring the concept of *communalism* in urban African American communities. Communalism is defined as

> an awareness of the fundamental interdependence of people....[where] one acts in accordance with the notion that duty to one's social group is more important than individual rights and privileges....Hence, one's identity is tied to group membership rather than to individual status and possessions. (Boykin, et al., p. 411)

Like communalism, the function of intergenerational closure looks to the good and general well-being of the group. Miller (1991) sees this social structure as a community mechanism for sharing resources, providing support, and "developing norms for governing children's behavior" (p. 18).

Values

Like many social philosophers, Dewey (1976) saw humans as beings drawn to the essential structure of community with a need to develop individually while among the social group.

> To learn to be human is to develop through the give-and-take of communication an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community; one who understands and appreciates its beliefs, desires and methods, and who contributes to a further conversion of organic powers into human resources and values. (Dewey, 1976, 2:332)

Community values co-opted by the individual through customs handed down by other members of the group become internalized and are difficult to change once they have formed. These strong bonds are what Miller (1991) calls "mutual understandings" of values (p.18) and are reinforced over time by people who interact on a personal level and on a regular basis. But because of modern mobility and technology, individuals with shared values may not necessarily live in close proximity of each other (Miller). Because of this, intergenerational modeling and reinforcement of common values may not occur and so, the intergenerational closure used to protect the community is not kept intact and is left to other enforcement agencies such as the police and schools.

Power

Max Weber extended Tönnies's concepts of social relationships into his own work. He saw communal relationships as "traditional and based on emotion, such as family or religious groups, but emphasized that even the most associative relationships had communal characteristics, such as the esprit de corp of a military unit" (Merz & Furman, 1997, p. 15). Weber concluded that the commonalities of the group created the possibility of coercion or even exploitation. When communities are closely monitored by its members, the individual's choice or will may be limited or stymied. The *Gemeinschaft* has a we-they mentality that may cause community members to gather the wagons or to shun those who are more closely aligned with the role of "they." Miller (1995) worries, as does Coleman (1987), that intergenerational closure may be "associated with [an] exclusivity and a separatist attitude that can isolate the children from the outside world. Children growing up in a close-knit community may be ill-equipped to enter the larger society or suffer culture shock upon entry" (Miller, p. 18).

Merz and Furman (1997) conclude their discussion on defining community by lamenting what they see as America's shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*. They are troubled by what they see as a loss of community in the traditional sense: a lack of a "sense of belonging, social monitoring, traditional socialization of youth, and the ability to take care of people's needs in an immediate way" (p. 31). In addition to and precluded by traditional considerations are the modern notions of "geographic mobility, role specialization, choice, and the notion of equality of individuals. These are aspects of our lives that are generally valued and that we might not be willing to give up" (p. 32). Keeping these "modern notions" in mind, for my present thinking and as a conclusion to this discussion of community, I would define community, such as I researched at Woody Gap and in Suches, as *Gemeinschaft* slightly to the right, a group whose members who are in close proximity to each other (whether that closeness be due to family connectedness, geographic location, or through deliberate associations); has a social structure resembling intergenerational closure or communalism; fosters, models, or explicitly teaches shared communal values and a sense of place.

The Rural Community School Versus Nation-building

Through historical reform efforts already discussed, rural schools have changed over the past one hundred and more years. Some changes have resulted in fewer rural schools, with more students finding themselves living farther from their schools and community centers. Increased distances in terms of personal power, involvement, and support may also be felt by the students' parents (often former students of their children's schools) and other community members. These feelings of disconnection might be a result of nation-building, a large scale reform effort that creates more uniform and effectively managed schools and districts and that demands greater accountability of schools to the state and federal government. Howley (1997a) critiques the concept of nation-building as a systemic means of improving rural (and other) schools, purporting that "during the past 150 years, improving rural schools also meant reshaping and redirecting them into a national system--a system of schooling, manufacture, trade, politics, and culture--that has insured, if not required, the depopulation of the countryside" (p. 132). He argues that a changed perspective must be used to improve rural education. The idea of national sovereignty, where "being American no longer has much to do with shaping the American ethos.... [because] the American ethos... is being constructed by elites whose primary allegiance is not to American democracy but to their own self-interest in the global marketplace" (p. 135) is obsolete and counterproductive to school reform. As a consequence of nation-building, Howley suggests, Americans have cultivated a larger anti-intellectual, anti-rural culture:

> [There] runs a deep disregard of actual rural places, diverse as they are. Disregard of these places entails the invisibility of the peculiarities of rural families, rural ways of living and working, and local rural meanings and knowledge. (p. 133)

I believe at the heart of Howley's essay is a plea for educators and researchers to recognize the unique and communal aspects of small rural schools. He provides a list to illustrate rural concerns for research and reform, asking that policy makers consider

> ~ senses of and attachment to rural places,
> ~ the relationship between school and community sustainability,
> ~ proper aims for an education committed to the rural community,
> ~ rural pathways to rural adulthoods,
> ~ community engagement in rural schools,
> ~ cultivation of appropriate local meanings, knowledge, and commitments.
> (p.136)

Howley advises that "education for nation-building is very different from education that would cultivate particular communities and the ideal of communities" (p. 136). Through continued consolidation of small rural schools into large rural campuses, schooling for students may become a more impersonal and alienating experience with little connection to where and with whom they live.

As the review of the current and historical literature in this chapter highlights, rural schooling often looks and acts different from other school settings. Those differences may be overlooked or ignored by policymakers who create and implement external reforms such as the consolidation of rural schools. As a result, a community that loses its school can find its students being schooled far from home, may lose its social and economic center, and might discover that its own demise is not far behind. Woody Gap School is a small rural school that, at the present, is not in danger of being consolidated with other schools in its county. It is too isolated and the local weather is too unpredictable for such a change. While Woody Gap School has always been situated in the community of whose members it serves, it still must be responsive and accountable to county, state, and federal mandates and reforms. In light of this, an examination of the relationship between this school and its community might allow us to see what kinds of interactions take place between school and community and what might be some of its member's perceptions of the school and community relationship.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between a small, rural school that has escaped consolidation and its surrounding community. Through the use of nontraditional data collection methods involving visual, textual, and oral communications of participants, I attempted to examine how a small, rural school's educators, students, and community members perceive connections between school and community. Because this study was both interpretive and descriptive, centering around the exploration of the subjective perceptions of a few members of an intimate and somewhat isolated setting, I chose a qualitative research design that incorporates an image-based approach for data collection and representation. Photography, as will be discussed, can assist in bringing a participant's memories, emotions, and sense-making to the surface as he or she shares and discusses his or her experiences with others.

Because image-based research is such a vital part of this study's research design and process and because it is such an unorthodox method, I first discuss its role as a research tool, defining terms specific to the employment of photography, providing a rationale for its use, and discussing two pilot studies I have conducted using image-based research as a data-collection tool. This is followed by sections that describe and discuss the research setting, participants, data collection and analysis.

Research Design

Because this is an interpretive and descriptive study bounded by time, its purpose being to better understand a school-community relationship, the object of study will be referred to as a "case study." Stake (1994) points out that case study is not a methodology, "but a choice of object to be studied. We choose to study the case. We could study it in many ways" (p. 236). Huberman and Miles (1994) define a case study as

> a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context--the unit of analysis, in effect. Normally there is a focus of attention and a more or less vaguely defined temporal, social, and/or physical boundary involved....Foci and boundaries can be defined by social unit size (an individual, a role, a small group, an organization, community, nation), by spatial location, or temporally (an episode, an event, a day). Cases may have subcases embedded within them. (p. 440)

The case for this study is a school-community relationship and its subcases are participant students and teachers from the selected small rural school and participant members from the surrounding community. The research methodology for this case study of a school-community relationship involved an image-based data collection process and employed strategies of photoelicitation, photointerviewing, photofeedback, and photoessay (as will be defined). For data analysis, I used within-case and cross-case analysis strategies. Before defining and describing these strategies and processes, I discuss the use of photography as an image-based research tool.

Image-Based Research

Historically, the use of the photographic image for research was first employed in ethnographic study by anthropologists around the turn of the 20th century. As a classification device, it was highly prized by researchers as they worked to organize the world's races according to current theories of social evolution (Harper, 1994). Eventually, by the 1920's, film and photography in the field were less celebrated and ended up for the most part relegated to the anthropologist's toolkit as research aids. Visual records as "truth-revealing mechanisms" were no longer considered to be central to the new and popular shift of anthropological study to world social organizations (Edwards, 1992, p.4). Bateson and Mead rekindled the use of images in the 1930's, using them in their research of the Balinese and resulting in the publication of *Balinese Character* (1942), a selection of photos chosen from over 25,000 images and arranged with accompanying text. Still, their employment of visual ethnography (now known as "visual anthropology') in the form of still photography did not catch fire in anthropological circles. In fact, according to Harper (1994), visual anthropology has since become "a discipline of film and video, as even a quick reading of the journals *Visual Anthropology* and *Visual Anthropology Review* attest. To the extent that anthropologists use photographs, they generally relegate them to record keeping or cataloguing" (p. 405).

Although most photography in visual anthropology is devoted to documentation purposes, some researchers do use photography as a method of research. But within the realm of visual anthropology, little attention has been given to the use of photographs for such research methods as photoelicitation, photointerviewing, photofeedback, or photoessay (Walker, 1993). Dempsey and Tucker (1991) surmise that "photography as a method of inquiry has not been applied systematically in educational research" (p. 2). And Schratz and Walker (1995) point out that this neglect is evident in the fact that "despite an enormous research literature that argues the contrary, researchers have trusted words (especially their own) as much as they have mistrusted pictures" (p. 72). Because the terms photoelicitation, photointerviewing, photofeedback, and photoessay are often used interchangeably in the literature; they warrant defining as data sources for clarity within this study.

Photoelicitation

Prosser and Schwartz (1998) define photoelicitation as the response to "a single set of photographs assembled by the researcher on the basis of prior analysis and selected with the assumption that the chosen images will have some significance for interviewees" (p. 124). Typically, photographs used for photoelicitation depict people (known or unknown), scenes (staged or natural), or symbols (implicit or explicit). Just as archival photographs may serve to "reconstitute events in the mind of the ethnographer" (Ruby, 1996, p.1345), particular photographs may also assist in jarring the memories of participants: "Photographs trigger recall and focus the interviewing process, enabling an in-depth look at intended as well as unintended aspects of a program" (Dempsey & Tucker, 1991, p.3).

Some researchers enlist participants to be the photographers; they can then create images that have meaning for them and, ideally, will share those meanings with the researcher. Harper (1998) sees this form of photoelicitation as a technique that

> promises a particularly apt alternative; a model for collaboration in research.... stretch[ing] the collaborative bond, so that the subjects direct the photography before interpreting them in [photo]interviews....The photoelicitation interview may redefine the relationships between subject and sociologist, and the interview material may be presented in any of a number of creative ways. These sensibilities from the new ethnography open the door for a creative and engaged visual ethnography. (p. 36)

For this study, I employed participant-produced photography and photoelicitation as means for collecting data. The photos for elicitation were planned and created by participants. Photoelicitation was achieved through both photofeedback and photointerviewing.

Photofeedback. As forms of photoelicitation, photofeedback differs from photointerviewing in that with the former, a researcher invites his or her participants to *write* their responses to selected photos. The researcher may provide a prompt for the feedback, but he or she does not directly interview the participant. The use of photofeedback can reduce feelings of vulnerability or anxiousness caused by talking directly to a researcher. But, depending on the research problem, its use may limit the depth and breadth of response when used exclusively and in lieu of the photointerview (Dempsey & Tucker, 1991). As a means of photoelicitation, participants in this study were asked to provide photofeedback by responding to their photographs in writing.

Photointerviewing. John Collier (Collier & Collier, 1986), a widely-read visual anthropologist, often had his participants hold photographs in their hands as he interviewed them. He used this method of photoelicitation, photointerviewing, to elicit responses from his participants because he felt that photos were "charged with psychological and highly emotional elements and symbols. In a depth of culture it is often this very characteristic that allows people to express their ethos while reading the photographs" (p. 108). Dempsey and Tucker (1991) have raised issues concerned with photointerviewing; calling on the researcher to be sensitive to the level of problem-solving skills of participants (which they maintain should be high if rich interpretations are to be gained from participants), the vulnerability of participants (who is controlling the interview with the photographs?), and the question of just how accurate are photographic representations of the participants' lives (if that is what is being photographed and presented for elicitation). These issues of concern are reduced when the photos are not the researcher's creations but of the participants' making. To learn more about their perceptions and sense-making, I asked participants to share their photographs with me, as I followed a semi-structured photointerview protocol of an open-ended series of questions.

The Photoessay

Photoelicitation is usually sought through the process of gathering written feedback from participants or through interviewing them as they view photographs which have been carefully selected by the researcher. This process is taken a step further and may be made richer when the photographs are created by the participants themselves. The combination of the data--participants' photos and the accompanying elicitation (spoken and written)-- can be used to create photoessays. For this study, I created photoessays by first matching each participant's written and spoken elicitations with each of their photographs, and then by creating themes with written and transcribed text and photographs.

Photography as a Research Tool

As previously discussed, the use of photography as a tool for data collection and analysis is not used by many researchers. A researcher who uses the photograph for inquiry may choose to do so because he or she has come to understand that there are some particular advantages of its use over more conventional approaches. Walker (1993) proposes the use of photography for research because "it touches on the limitations of language, especially language used for descriptive purposes" (p. 72). In light of Walker's suggestion, Schratz and Steiner-Loffler (1998) embarked on a study of a group of Viennese primary children as the children photographed places in their school and created photoessays about their school experiences.

Seeking to use the visual image as an alternative to traditional means for research data, Schratz and Steiner-Loffler sent student teams out to roam the halls and grounds of their school in search of what they "liked" and "disliked" about their school day. The researchers hoped that the children's search and use of the camera's eye would lead them to do what Walker (1993) suggests as "find[ing] ways of thinking about social life that escape the traps set by language" (p. 72). Recognizing that schooling is a social complexity, Schratz and Steiner-Loffler propose that this "breaking down reality into photographic images is always an act of constructing new realities in our conceptual world" (1998, p. 246). By using the camera as a way to "freeze" their views and opinions, students are searching to "find the unknown in the known and to sense where relationships exist between their school world and their world of feelings" (p. 246).

As students selected what to photograph for their own personal reasons, they created "private" photographs. Berger (1991) explains that a private photograph is a photograph that belongs within the realm of the lived experience. It is the photograph of the individual's own choosing, thinking, and making. He or she alone may know why it has importance for him or her. The private photo is surrounded by meaning and cannot be understood without "engaging subjectivities" (Walker, 1993, p. 83). Walker suggests that we look at private photographs as keys to memory, rather than facts. The image is not important but what we make of the image and the relationship with it. The questions are not about photographs as records so much as about the ways in which they are interpreted. Schratz and Steiner-Loffler (1998) also see the acts of taking photos and responding to them as a process for participants to tap into their own private knowledge and understandings: they suggest that it is a research tool that helps to make "visible the invisible" (p. 250).

Collier and Collier (1986) call this use of photography the "can-opener effect" (p. 25). They contend that photographs sharpen memories and "offer a gratifying sense of self-expression as the informant is able to explain and identify content and educate the interviewer with his wisdom" (p. 106). The Colliers see possibilities for participants to express the emotions and the ethos that lay just below the "surface content" of photographs, stressing that "ultimately, the only way we can use the full record of the camera is through the projective interpretation by the native" (p. 108). For example, in their discussion of work by John Collier and Benard Siegel, Collier and Collier relate how during a study of the residents of the Picuris Pueblo, both Collier and Siegel assumed that it would be the ceremonial deer dance performed at the local Summer Fiesta (a community celebration) residents would identify as the central activity at this annual gathering. Instead, they discovered--through photointerviewing--that it was actually a simple foot race that held their participants' highest esteem and not the dance: "It was when the photographs were used in interviews that [the] value and significance was discovered" (p. 129). Through photographs, Collier and Siegel were able to discover their participants' emotional connections to and meaning makings of a particular event.

It is these notions of the private photograph and the "can-opener effect" that has led me to think of the photograph as a means for exploring how members perceive the relationship of a small rural school and its community. It is not the photographs themselves that might reveal how students, teachers, or community members perceive a relationship, but the memories and sense-making associated with them. As Berger (1980) notes,

> Yet, unlike memory, photographs do not in themselves preserve meaning. They offer appearances--prised [sic] away from their meaning. Meaning is the result of understanding functions. "And functioning takes place in time, and must be explained in time. Only that which narrates can make us understand." (p. 55)

It was through the act of producing and responding to private photographs that participants in this study were asked to think about and discuss how they perceive and identify the relationship between Woody Gap School and its surrounding community.

Pilot Studies

Because there is scant literature around the proposed research design, I have depended on traditional methods of qualitative design and on what I have learned from two pilot studies I have conducted to help guide me in the design of methods for data collection, data analysis, and the selection of participants. Prior to this study, I conducted two pilot studies which employ the use of photography as a research tool. In both studies, participants took their own photographs, responded to the photographs and created photoessays.

Pilot Study 1

In my first Pilot Study, I was the sole participant in a self-study, in which I sought to examine my own experiences, beliefs, and biases that might come out of years of being a rural educator. The design involved my taking photographs at the site of my last employment as a classroom teacher, organizing the photos, and then eliciting data by photointerviewing myself.

At the time, it did not seem to make sense for me to talk to myself (although I could have done that, using a tape recorder). Instead, I responded to each photo in writing, generating photofeedback. Next, I matched all the photos with the accompanying text, to create what I call a "private" photoessay, and finally, I selected those photos and texts which "spoke" the most powerfully to me and created a "public" photoessay--a crudely produced book. For the analysis portion of the study, I wrote about my "experiences" in the context of reflexive thinking about the self, as a researcher coming from the classroom in a rural school setting and as one whose experiences are constantly being rewritten as I go through new and different experiences. I also discussed the use of photography as an appropriate methodology for this study.

This pilot study was a very powerful exercise. Several important aspects around using photography as a research tool surfaced for me as a result. First, the very acts of taking photographs and choosing not to take photographs are complex and worth examining. Thinking about this process, I described this realization in my own photoessay (Sampson, 1999):

> As soon as I stepped out of my car and planned my first shot, I realized that this venture into the field was not going to be a simple process. Where was the beginning? How deep do I go? How wide do I go? How could my questions best guide me as each snap of the shutter brought another memory, or feeling? I found myself taking pictures of blank walls and empty rooms (not because of what they were, but because of the stories they represented). In rhizomatic fashion, I would snap a photo and wander off to the out of doors or up the hall to the lunchroom, sometimes, only to double back again....As I went about framing my shots, I thought about my choices: what was I choosing to ignore, omit, or include? How did I come to hold my camera at a certain angle or direction that allowed me to "see something"? What might have prevented my photographing because of lighting, distance, or my own boredom? How might the photographs I was taking allow me to talk about the shots I didn't or couldn't take? (p. 11)

Thinking about my own thinking helped me to better understand and appreciate the enormity and the elusiveness of recalling and reconstructing personal experiences.

Second, although I had originally planned to take photographs during the school day and was disappointed when I realized that my "journey" would take place after school hours--without the benefit of student and faculty faces, voices, and movements--an empty school sans its members was a serendipitous turn for my walkabout. As Berger and Walker have both suggested, it was not the content of what I photographed but the context and the process for thinking about my experiences that were important. Without the distractions of the present, I was able to hear the echoes and see the details of past events, favorite stories, personal interchanges, and emotional talk. Looking at a water fountain at the end of the hall, I was able to "see" teachers propped on stools (me with them), students sipping water and laughing, and the hustle and bustle involved in the morning preparation for the day's work.

Third, I was very surprised at the level of intensity of the memories and the emotions evoked as I attempted to photograph my past. The whole undertaking left me exhausted, but convinced that the use of photography can not only help us "see," but it also asks us to slow down and consider, to think about what it is we *are* seeing and what it is we *don't* see.

Pilot Study 2

The second pilot study was conducted in a classroom of mixed ability sixth graders. I decided to replicate Schratz's and Steiner-Loffler's (1998) project for this pilot, using photography as a means for conducting a school evaluation. Students were asked to work in groups and to list places where they felt comfortable or liked to be and places where they felt uncomfortable or didn't like to be. Using the process of consensus, groups listed their members' similar likes and dislikes and decided which of these places they would photograph. Equipped with digital cameras (students were given a mini-lesson on the use of the digital camera beforehand), groups dispersed with their chaperones to take photos around the campus. Returning to their classrooms, group members spent the next several days responding first orally --to group members--and then in writing to their photographs. Finally they created public photoessays with photos and texts of their own choosing. Students were quite enthusiastic about this project, partly due, I think, to the novelty of using cameras for their studies and partly because they liked having their opinions asked.

After debriefing with students and their teacher about the process, I came away with several points to consider when using cameras for research with young students. The first and most obvious observation: photographing places or things thoughtfully and responding to those photographs takes time. Students were a bit too rushed (we spent one hour photographing 10 sites on campus). Their teacher and I agreed with them that they also needed time on their own, individually, to do more thinking and responding.

Second, it was surprising to me that several groups placed duplicate photos in their final essays for the purpose of dichotomous discussions. For example, one group included two photos of a school bus. For one bus photo, their accompanying text described the nerve-racking ride home from school with a driver they characterized as strict and unreasonable, while the other photo was captioned with a happy recounting of a field trip with fellow students and teachers. The bus photos represented memories of both pleasant and unpleasant experiences for these students.

A third observation came from the adults accompanying students while on their picture-taking expedition. As students worked at photographing their group's pre-agreed upon places or objects, they were continuously drawn to other places or objects. This is a similar urge I had in my own self-study (Sampson, 1999): "Stories echoed everywhere. I 'found' sights, sounds, faces, movements. Memories came flooding back. Which to grab as they came rushing in and back out again?" (p.12). As they were working, students continued to assess and to think about their experiences, remembering feelings about particular places and the events represented by those places.

The Photo Erased

Lastly, and inherent in both of the pilot studies, is the danger of "studying up": critiquing situations or attributing unfavorable characteristics to others who are in positions of power or who are decision-makers in the school or community. For example, several groups in the second pilot study photographed classrooms and expressed their frustrations and displeasure in being in classrooms with particular teachers. One group identified a teacher as boring and as one who stifled their creativity and expression. Another group identified a teacher as someone who stressed them out by challenging them to work hard. (Further elicitation through photointerviewing *might* have revealed that these students might have been anxious about learning their lessons, rather than really upset with the teacher.) It is this issue of vulnerability that has prompted me to devise a data representation for my dissertation study I call the "photo erased."

Because the research site for the dissertation study is so small and intimate, it would not take much detective work to discover the source of any criticism that may come out of a participant's photographic representation of aspects of a relationship such as one between a school and community. And, so, the "photo erased"--an empty text box used in lieu of a photograph created by a participant that is dangerous for the participant or others connected to the participant's discussion--stands in its place. This altered representation allows the participant and the researcher to continue their discussion, since it is the photoelicitation, not the actual content of the photograph that is the focus of the study.

Research Setting

Because Woody Gap School is the smallest school in Georgia, situated in the community it serves, and is located in a rural setting, I elected to use this school and the surrounding community of Suches for my research setting.

The School

Located in the Northeast Georgia mountain town of Suches, this tiny school in Union County can be reached by navigating steeply winding roads which snake up and over the mountains. At one point, part of the way down the last steep mountain, the road widens to reveal a pristine setting of rolling hills, pastures, a sparkling lake, and a small ridge where the campus of Woody Gap School rests. Built of quarried stone by community members in 1940, the school was a commissioned projected overseen by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Woody Gap School serves approximately 100 students, grades kindergarten through twelve (K-12) and has 15 full-time faculty. This school is the last K-12 school in existence in Georgia (Georgia Department of Education, 2001) and the only remaining Georgia school classified as a "rural isolated school" (Woody Gap School, 1998, p. 1). As a result of this classification, Woody Gap is the only school in Georgia to receive a yearly sparsity grant from the state to assist with the costs of salaries and the education of Suches's children. A participant in the Rural School and Community Trust organization, Woody Gap School belongs to the TennGaLina Consortium, a group of five small schools all located in the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

To examine Woody Gap School is to examine a small rural school in an isolated location of Southern Appalachia that has yet to be consolidated and removed from its community. As it is with all public schools, Woody Gap School is charged with providing its students with an education while meeting external demands: policy and procedures for schooling that emanate from the local school board, the school system's central office, the Georgia Department of Education and state school board, and various state and federal agencies. Examples of such mandates would include class sizes, block scheduling, publication and ranking of standardized test scores, and curriculum standards.

The Community

The town of Suches depends on Woody Gap School to educate its children and to provide activities for its families and local citizens. As a former school principal notes, "There is no community without Woody Gap School" (personal communication, 1999). With an elevation of almost 3,000 feet, the town of Suches is the highest community in Georgia (Harrell, 1986). It is surrounded by five mountain passes and boasts a population of around 600 (Wynn Mott, personal communication, 1999). This community is in the southern part of Union County (see Appendix A for map) and encompasses a large area extending from Woody Gap School northwest to the Fannin County line and northeast to Wolf Pen Gap, and southward to the Lumpkin County line (Woody Gap School/Suches Community Media Center Project, 1998). It is surrounded by five mountains: Black Mountain, Big Cedar Mountain, Slaughter Mountain, Rocky Mountain, and Blood Mountain (personal communication, April 29, 1999, Brasstown Bald, U.S. Forest Service Office). The treacherous roads leading in and out of the area are steep and winding cutbacks carved out of the mountains and often impassable in the winter as evidenced by the following newspaper account:

> After they toured the school, the state officials were put on a school bus to Blairsville, which is where the students would have to go if Woody Gap [School] was closed. The driver took off down Black Mountain. After 26 miles of precipitous cutbacks and gear-grinding, the state officials decided no one, and certainly not schoolchildren, should have to undergo such a commute. (Cawthorn, 1988, p. A1)

There is slim chance that the conditions that created the isolation of the Suches community and Woody Gap School will change in the near future since they are surrounded by federal wilderness areas and national forests.

As described in the above sections, it is evident that Woody Gap School and the community of Suches are settings that are unique, small and remote; some might say they are exotic research sites or educative anomalies in Georgia. This may be true. But, it is my hope, that this study allowed "the strange to make familiar," that an exploration of an intensive example--Georgia's smallest, most isolated, only K-12 school and its community--can provide some insights on what happens when a rural school is left intact to educate while still rooted in the community where students live and the school serves.

The next sections of this dissertation focus on how I went about this exploration. In them, I discuss the selection of the research participants and processes employed for data collection and data analysis.

Research Participants

Morse (1994) says that a "good informant is one who has the knowledge and experience the researcher requires, has the ability to reflect, is articulate, has the time to be interviewed, and is willing to participate in the study" (p. 228). Since this study is focused around a description of the relationship between a school and its community, three groupings of informants or participants were involved in the project: community members, school teachers, and students. Selection of participants from each group was primary (i.e. the researcher selected the participants) and purposeful (the researcher used the above criteria as outlined by Morse).

Selecting Student Participants

In keeping with Morse's advice that participants be knowledgeable with the ability to reflect, be willing, and articulate, I originally proposed to find "information-rich" (Patton, 1990, p. 169) student participants through a "warm-up" activity. This activity would invite students to create photoessays that are autobiographical. Through the examination and discussion of these resulting photoessays, I would select two students for my dissertation study. Since I have extensive knowledge around the developmental characteristics of middle schoolers, I believed this activity would work best as a class assignment in a middle grades classroom.

Instead, I recruited three high school students from the Woody Gap High School Student Council. My thinking around this design change began the first day I was in the field. On that day I attended a presentation given by the Student Council to the local school board in Blairsville. This presentation was the same presentation these students had recently given in Nebraska at the Rural Challenge Student Extravaganza (a national consortium that works to promote academic excellence and student participation in rural schools); the focus was around the common activities of the community and school and presented in a student-produced multimedia format with graphics, video, sound clips, and photographs. The presentation was on Monday. By Friday, I found myself doubting the probability of younger (i.e. middle school) students being adept enough to create photographs representing a concept as abstract as "relationship." This reconsideration pointed me to the Student Council as a pool for potential student participants. An excerpt from my field notes (Sampson, 2000) describes my initial realization of the Council's potential:

> I need to describe the trip to the Union County Board of Education in Blairsville last night. I went (down a harrowing road) to watch WGS's student council present what they did in Nebraska (Annenberg's Student Extravaganza). They

> talked about Woody Gap School as they displayed a multimedia show. It was all centered around school and community. It was marvelous, and their work has been pecking at me all day. They are so in tune with this aspect of community. Their multimedia project featured several photographs they had snapped of school and community activities and interactions. I don't think I would even have to do a warm-up activity with them. If I go by way of the student council, I am already zooming in on the most active segment of the student body. (April 10)

Consequently, at the next Student Council meeting and with the permission of the Council sponsor, I presented to members the study, my purpose, what I was looking for in way of participation by students, and what their individual participation might involve. Keeping the discussion brief, while assuring students that they were in no way obligated to participate, I gave each student at the meeting a 27-exposure disposable camera and invited them to spend a week taking pictures of "anything they wanted." I asked them to plan to spend a few minutes talking with me about these pictures, theirs to keep. This was to be their warm-up activity. Seven out of nine Student Council members used and returned their cameras within two weeks.

After having the film from their cameras developed, I met with each of the seven students privately and asked him or her to talk about his or her photos. As a result of these conversations, I approached three students (a tenth-grade male, an eleventh-grade male, and a senior female) who appeared to be the most articulate, active in the community, and interested in the study. They each agreed to participate. I decided to ask three students instead of two (as originally planned) because, contrary to what Morse recommends, sparing large blocks of time for interviews was not a practicality for these hardworking teenagers. Coming into the field, I had not foreseen just how busy and distracted they would be with end-of-the-year school and community activities and obligations they were compelled to not only attend, but to organize and facilitate. By the very fact that Woody Gap School is *so* small, it depends on its students, particularly its high schoolers, to wear many hats. And while students seemed very willing to participate and were appreciative of these opportunities, additional demands and distractions seemed to agitate them emotionally and add to their already high levels of stress and fatigue. This was apparent as I approached students regarding participation in this study. They were willing to participate, but, apologetically, only to a point. As I pointed out in a discussion of one of my pilot studies (p.32), taking photographs thoughtfully takes time. So to compensate for shorter spans of participation, I added an additional student participant.

Selecting Teacher and Community Participants

To select participant teachers and community members, I used Patton's (1990) snowball or chain sampling approach. This approach entails looking for participants by asking "well-situated people" (p.176) whom they would recommend for the study. Patton recommends asking a large number of people: "In most programs or systems, a few key names or incidents are mentioned repeatedly. Those people or events recommended as valuable by a number of different informants take on special importance."

Teachers. Within two weeks of being in the field, I invited two teachers to participate in this study. My being on this very small campus every day, all day, allowed me the time and mobility to meet and spend time with all of the school's teachers, administrators, aides, and other staff members. (It is because of the close quarters of the school that I endeavor here to ensure the confidentiality of participants--particularly, teachers--by refraining from using gender-specific pronouns.) Many of the faculty and staff had an interest in the study and sought to learn more about it on a regular basis. So, they seemed to have a high comfort level when it came to discussing its purpose, the school's role in it, and who might be a reliable informant for participation.

Interestingly, although I had intended to work with only two teacher participants, another teacher in the school approached me and asked to join us in the study. This teacher felt that the activities involved would be of personal and professional benefit, and because I found this teacher to be articulate, knowledgeable, and reflective, I eagerly agreed.

I decided that it would be helpful to do the same kind of photography warm-up activity with teacher participants as I had used with potential student participants. I wanted to give them opportunities to practice thinking with the camera and talking about their pictures. I was concerned that the novelty of a one-time activity (i.e. the research activity) might limit their discussions and reflections. I hoped that the "dry run" would help us feel more comfortable and to build rapport, while allowing us practice in talking with their photographs. In retrospect, I believe that this was an essential activity, in that it allowed us to become better acquainted with each other and be more at ease while talking with participant photographs.

After presenting a brief outline of the study to each of four potential participants, I gave them each a 27-exposure disposable camera, asking them to make photographs of their own choosing and to plan to talk with me about those photos. Three of the four completed the activity; one did not. After meeting with each of the three who completed the activity, I asked them to participate in the study. They consented to join. Teaching levels of these remaining three male and female teacher participants ranged from upper elementary to high school.

Community members. The selection of community members was a bit more complex than the selection of students or teachers for several reasons. 1) Most community members are not in the school setting for long periods of time or on a regular basis. 2) As I attempted to find participants through Patton's snowball/chain approach, I found that "well-situated" people in the school, and then the community, directed me to *historically* knowledgeable people, people who had lived long lives in Suches and knew a lot of the local lore, but who were not be particularly knowledgeable about the current relationship between the community and the school. 3) The setting of Suches encompasses a lot more ground (literally) than the setting of Woody Gap School. The tension between time and space prevented me from doing the kind of in-depth detective work that I would have preferred, yet, I am satisfied that the two community members who agreed to participate were knowledgeable and articulate informants who contributed a great deal to the study.

As I did with students and teachers, I gave each community participant a camera and invited each one to take photographs and to talk with me about them. Because both community participants were articulate, knowledgeable, living in Suches, actively involved in community and school activities and functions, I invited them to participate in this study. They differed in age, gender, occupation, avocational interests, and volunteer activities; both have lived in the community for over 20 years.

Data Collection and Analysis

In previous sections, I have already described types of image-based data sources and methods of data collection. Earlier, I suggested ways that these types of sources and collections fit into my own research. Here, I discuss each stage of the data collection process (see Table 1), then describe how I analyzed the collected participant data, and, finally, how I collected and analyzed data for developing the researcher's piece: a story, or montage used to contextualize Woody Gap School and its community. Data collection occurred over a eight week period in the spring of 2000.

Stage I: Participant Selection and The Warm-Up Activity

Teacher and community participants were selected using a primary and purposeful approach (see section on research participants, this chapter). Through the use of Patton's (1990) snowball/chain approach, I spent time in the field talking with school and community members to identify teacher and community potential participants. To find student participants, I used a warm-up photography activity with Student Council members as a vehicle for conversations with potential participants. As a way to "grease the wheels" for thinking with a camera, I used this same activity with in the study. The three students, three teachers, and two community members who participated in the study were articulate, knowledgeable, and reflective. They were, to different extents, willing to explore and discuss the school's relationship with the community and to do it through photography (see Appendix B: Participant Consent Forms).

Table 1

Stages for Data Collection

Stage	Activity	Data Sources Collected
I	Selection Process for Participants Warm-Up Activity/Snowball Approach.	
	Research Historical and Demographic Records and Artifacts, Take Photographs, Record Observations	Collected Notes on Materials, Photographs, Field Notes
II	Photo-Production and Photofeedback Distribute Cameras, Participants Create Photographs and Provide Written Responses to Each Photo Member Checks	Photographs, Written Feedback
	Research Historical and Demographic Records and Artifacts, Take Photographs, Record Observations	Collected Notes on Materials, Photographs, Field Notes
III	Photointerviewing Interview Participants with their Photographs, Member Checks.	Mental Photographs, Interviews,Transcripts, Member Checks
	Research Historical and Demographic Records and Artifacts, Take Photographs, Record Observations	Collected Notes on Materials, Photographs, Field Notes
IV	Photoessays	
	Private Photoessays: Match Oral and Written Responses to Photographs for Research Purposes Create Themes from Private Photoessays.	Private Photoessays Member Checks
	Public Photoessays: Created from Private Photoessays	Public Photoessays
	Research Historical and Demographic Records and Artifacts, Take Photographs, Record Observations	Collected Notes on Materials, Photographs, Field Notes

During this stage, I also researched for my own piece for contextualizing Woody Gap School and its community. Gathering historical, demographic, and popular texts and accounts while recording field notes and taking photographs, I strove to collect data for the telling of a story of Woody Gap School's relationship to its community. I discuss this part of the research methodology in greater detail later in this chapter and in Chapter 4.

Stage II: Photo-Production and Photofeedback

At this point in the study, participants were asked to create their own photographs, using a 27-exposure disposable camera provided by the researcher and then to provide written responses to each photograph. Disposable cameras were chosen to use in this study because they are relatively inexpensive and simple to operate. Using the same brand and type of camera assured a more consistent quality of photograph from participant to participant. The disposable camera was selected over a digital camera for several reasons: 1) digital images can be erased via the camera by the participant and data could be discarded before I had the opportunity to examine it; 2) digital cameras are expensive. If a disposable camera is left behind, damaged, or lost, the loss of data is lamentable, but the camera is easily replaced; and 3) "point and shoot" disposable cameras require less instruction for operation than digital cameras, reducing the variable of making technical mistakes or forgetting operational procedures. Disposable cameras used color film--no black and white--which was not an obstacle, since the artistic composition of the photographs was not a point of the activity.

The "right" number of exposures for this kind activity was an unknown, so, to prevent the sending of any subliminal signals as to the "correct" number of photographs to produce, one camera was assigned with assurances from me that while not all exposures need be used, if additional cameras were desired, they would be provided upon request. No one requested an additional camera, and no one used all 27 exposures on a camera. Number of photographs produced with a camera ranged from five to 23.

Participants were asked to return their used cameras to me within two weeks for development. All of the adult participants returned their cameras within the two week period. With all three student participants, I had to tactfully encourage them to complete the activity and to return their cameras. After giving friendly reminders and waiting an extra week, I chose to ask them for their cameras for fear that time for the study would run out. All except one returned them within the fourth week. The last camera was returned at the beginning of the sixth week. To save time and expense and to avoid the need to make artistic decisions for development, I had the photographs developed by a commercial business.

Returning developed photographs to the participants, I asked each one to put them in the order they preferred and to reflect on them. I provided each participant with a blank floppy disk, a permanent marker, the photographs, and written instructions (see Appendix C: Instructions for Photofeedback). Although this stage of the data collection was concerned with photofeedback (written feedback to photographs), participants were given choices for responding; responses could be handwritten, typed, or dictated. Of the eight participants, six chose to type their photofeedback (see Appendix D for an example). Two student participants chose not to respond in writing, selecting only to be interviewed. All participants put their photographs in the order they preferred and numbered each photograph on the back. One participant paid for the development of the film on his own. He gave these prints, the negatives, and a disk with a copy of the photographs to me along with his photofeedback.

Stage III: Photointerviewing

As each participant finished with the photofeedback activity, s/he was asked to sit with me and to discuss the photographs in a photointerview (see Appendix E: Photointerview Script). During the photointerviewing, a participant could choose to not respond to any particular photograph for whatever reason. Of the eight participants, two participants did not respond to two photographs of their photographs (a total of four), photos they called "mistakes." One participant marked "not used" on the back of two photographs and did not write about or discuss those photographs.

At the end of each photointerview, I would ask each participant, "Are there any photographs that you did not take or were unable to take that you wish you had?" Most times, participants would either return to a subject discussed earlier during the interview ("Like I said, I wish I had gotten a better picture of the stage because...") or would enter into a new area of discussion ("It's been on my mind the whole time that I should have taken a picture of..."). In several cases, the response to this question of the untaken photograph would produce more text than any other single photograph.

After each photointerview was transcribed, a follow-up interview, with the transcriptions, was conducted to give each participant the opportunity to clarify, change, delete, or add data. This was the member check for the photointerviews and an additional opportunity to gather more data.

During this stage, I continued to research Woody Gap School and its community, gathering historical, demographic, and popular texts and accounts while recording field notes and taking my own photographs.

Stage IV: Private Photoessays

During this stage I created a "private" photoessay for each participant (see Appendix F for an example). The private photoessay I refer to is the compilation of a participant's text, transcripts, and photographs--what Patton (1990) calls the "case record" (p. 386). They are "private" because they are not created for public display, but are within-case arrangements of data by the researcher. Here, the participant's confidentiality is protected and what s/he says remains unpublished. Scanned photos were combined with texts from photofeedback and photointerviews to create a participant's private photoessay.

Once the private photoessays were organized, I used them to create themes for analyzing and representing findings. I used a graphic organizer to arrange and rearrange data patterns (see Appendix G for an example of the "thematic organizer'). Since I plan to share these themes publicly, I refer to them as "public" photoessays. Here I have analyzed, reduced and arranged selections of transcribed voice, texts, and photographs from each (within-case) and all participants (across-case). Private and public photoessays can assist the researcher in organizing, discussing, and representing his or her findings.

Data Management

One copy of each photograph was created, along with a photo file (a 4x6 card with thumbnail copies of photos) and a set of negatives. The negatives, photo file, a backup interview tape, a floppy disk with a copy of photofeedback, interview transcriptions, and a photoessay were all placed in a safety deposit box at a nearby bank. Each participant's photographs were then scanned into a computer and printed. These were stored with an interview tape, and a floppy disk with copies of the transcriptions and photofeedback. Backup copies of photoessays were created, printed, and stored in my office. A thematic organizer was attached to each private photoessay.

During my six weeks in the field, I used a total of 45 rolls of film. These photographs are stored in a file box in my office. Negatives are in a safety deposit box. Copies of documents, articles, newsletters, and book excerpts, along with artifacts gathered along the way, have been organized and stored in a loose-leaf notebook in my office. Journal entries, an activity log, signed image release forms, signed participant permission forms, and data memos are either stored on the hard drive of my computer with a floppy disk backup, in a safety deposit box, or in a file box in my office.

Participant Data Analysis

This study, which explored the relationship between a small rural school and its surrounding community, is an interpretive, descriptive case study, using a combination of visual, spoken, and written data collection sources. Erickson (1990) uses the term *interpretive* to refer to "the whole family of approaches to participant observational research" (p. 77). He prefers the term, *interpretive*, in part, because "it points to the key feature of family resemblance among the various [qualitative] approaches--central research interest in human meaning in social life and in its elucidation and exposition by the researcher" (p. 78). In their discussion of ethnomethodology, Holstein and Gubrium (1994) hold that the intent of interpretive research isn't to provide static explanations of causation around behavior or actions or to produce one objective reality. Instead, it should be recognized that the researcher and the researched are not passive, but are in the lived world and constantly negotiating and sustaining locally constructed social structures. Geertz (1973) reflects on ethnographic researching and reporting of such research, saying that it is interpretive and "what it is interpretive of is the flow of social discourse; and the interpreting involved consists in trying to rescue the 'said' of such discourse from its perishing occasions and fix it in perusable terms" (p. 20). In an attempt to make sense of collected data, I have made my own interpretations. These interpretations do not hold tight to one point in a linear concept of time or map of place, but, rather, have resulted from one dip into the fluid and complex intersection of school and community.

Merriam (1998) describes a descriptive case study as "one that presents a detailed account of the phenomenon under study....Such studies often form a database for future comparison and theory building" (p. 38). The relationship of Woody Gap School and its surrounding community is the case for this study and the participants in the study are subcases. For simplicity, the term "case" or "cases" will be used, respectively, when discussing a case, cases, a subcase, or subcases.

The method for data analysis for this interpretive, descriptive case study is a within-case and cross-case analysis using a constant-comparative approach. The constant-comparative analysis, where data is constantly compared as a means for informing the researcher's thinking and actions, occurred throughout the study as private photoessays were created, themes developed, member checks conducted, and public photoessays were produced. Within-case, cross-case analysis is discussed in the next section with the following sections concerning participant data analysis.

Within-Case, Cross-Case Analysis. When looking at within-cases, each case is seen as a complete case in and of itself and analysis is confined to data collected from that case. Cross-case analysis comes about when the researcher looks at all the cases in the study to discern themes or patterns across the cases. Cross-case analysis occurs after within-case analysis is complete (Merriam, 1998). Patton (1990) suggests that each case analysis begin with a case record, "The case record pulls together and organizes the voluminous case data into a comprehensive, primary resource package. The case record includes all the major information that will be used in doing the final case analysis" (p. 386). The case record for each participant in the study includes participant-produced photographs and photofeedback, photointerviews, follow-up photointerviews and member checks. Looking more closely at how case record data can be analyzed, Miles and Huberman (1994) define case study analysis as consisting of three parts: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing verification.

Data Reduction. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that the research design of a qualitative study is in and of itself analytic and reductive: "Choices of conceptual framework, of research questions, of samples, of the 'case' definition itself....all involve anticipatory data reduction which...is an essential aspect of data analysis" (p. 430). Realizing that no qualitative researcher can ever examine and report every aspect of his or her study, I collected data from a variety of sources while, at the same time, I aimed to keep data from reaching an overwhelming level. One way I did this is by focusing my research within a bounded system, the case study (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). Boundaries that can ensure data reduction are time constraints, the research setting, research questions and purpose, number and selection of participants, and types of data sources. Data reduction also occurred as text, transcribed responses, and photographs were selected to form themes within cases and across cases, and then summarized and described. Criteria for the selection of this data came out of Merriam's (1998) discussion of the use of an intuitive approach to selection. Employing the constant-comparative method, I continuously considered data, omitting that which was redundant, irrelevant, or "dangerous." Dangerous data was not ignored or discarded but treated differently (see next section and the section on the "photo erased"). Dangerous data might include photographs, written feedback, or oral responses that identify individuals or groups. Another method for trying to determine whether too much or not enough data has been reduced is through the use of data displays.

Data Displays: From Private to Public Photoessays. Miles and Huberman (1994) define the data display as "an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action" (p. 11). Data displays are methods for looking at data and organizing themes, allowing the researcher to "see what is happening" (p.11). Using the constant-comparative method and an inductive approach, whereby themes, patterns, and categories of analysis "emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1990, p. 391), the researcher designs displays and then redesigns them as the study's themes are developed, reexamined, redeveloped, and reorganized anytime new data is collected and analyzed. By organizing collected data sources (Appendix F, Private Photoessay) into themes (Appendix G, Thematic Organizer) and situating them as displays or public photoessays, I was able to discern patterns, layers, connections, continuums, similarities, differences, etc. that provided for a better understanding of participants' perceptions and sense-making and allowed me to present my research findings with logical and cohesive arrangements. As I assembled themes from data found in the private photoessays, I also had to consider some of the risks for participants that could result in moving data from the private to the public. To reduce this risk, I chose to omit specific references to persons or groups identified by participants. Instead, I assigned a generic term to identify these references. Rather than call a group or person by a specific ethnicity, gender, nationality, or religion, I refer to the group or person as "this particular group" or "this particular person." In using generic or broad terms, I hope to assist the reader in recognizing that it is the differences between groups or individuals that is being discussed, rather than the specific characteristics of that group or individual.

Conclusion Drawing and Verification. The third area of analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) starts, according to the authors, at the beginning of data collection. The use of constant-comparative strategies and the build-in of member checks require the researcher to make decisions and draw conclusions about all aspects of the research design throughout the study and to verify data with participants. The researcher must ensure that meanings emerging from the data speak to "plausibility, their sturdiness, and confirmability" (p. 11). Creswell (1994), Merriam (1998), and Patton (1990) agree that data collection and analysis are activities which should occur simultaneously. In fact, they would contend that it would be difficult to keep them separate. Patton explains that as fieldwork comes to a close, and the researcher has more knowledge about the research setting, he or she begins to devote more time to interpretations and confirming what is observed: analysis has begun before data collection ends and the researcher has left the site. Merriam recommends this approach of simultaneous collection and analysis for practical reasons. After describing a scenario in which the researcher sits down to deal with pages and pages of transcripts, she describes another scene in which as the researcher,

> you sit down at the dining room table with nothing more than the transcript of your first interview, or the field notes from your first observation, or the first document you collected. You review the purpose of your study. You read and reread the data, making notes in the margins to comment on the data. You write a separate memo to yourself capturing your reflections, tentative themes, hunches, ideas, and things to pursue that are derived from this first set of data....Months later, as you sit down to analyze and write up your findings, you have a set of tentative categories or themes--answers to your research questions from which to work. (p. 161)

This sensible method of managing research employs the constant-comparative approach. It provides a way for the researcher to analyze what is going on with data throughout the study and to act on it, rather than delineating research in discrete and artificial stages. I strove to employ this approach through constant examination of data and memo writing, journaling on a daily basis, reading current and relevant literature, and by engaging on a regular basis in conversations with professional peers, professors, and members of the

Woody Gap School and Suches community. I would note that, in my first attempts to keep with the constant-comparative approach, I naively tried to analyze freshly developed participant-produced photographs before returning them to participants--without the benefit of their narration. I should have known better. I was able to make little or no sense of them. As Berger says, "Yet, unlike memory, photographs do not in themselves preserve meaning." It wasn't until after participants wrote to their photographs, that I was able to gain any insights into their perspectives and consider what those perspectives might mean.

Reflexivity. As part of the constant-comparative approach to data analysis, I endeavored to be reflexive about my thinking as a field researcher throughout the entire study, to be deliberate in my discussions around data analysis procedures, and to be explicit about my experiences in "doing" research. I attempted to journal through my methodological quandaries, frustrations, and insights. This did not always provide concrete answers for the research dilemmas I faced within this study, but it certainly helped to inform my thinking, guide my epistemological stance, and gratefully, it provided both a playspace and a vent for talking about some of the unexpected personal and professional delights and dilemmas that I experienced throughout my time in the field.

Contextualizing Woody Gap School and the Suches Community

The purpose of this piece of the study (Chapter 4) is to tell a story of a small, rural school situated in its community from my perspective. Using Tuchman's (1994) technique of montage and Van Maanen's (1988) vehicle of the impressionist tale, I used field notes, and texts from historical narratives, popular accounts, and local documents and records to contextualize Woody Gap School in the Suches community. Examples of texts include student-produced newsletters, magazines, and yearbooks; newspaper articles; anecdotal accounts from teachers, staff, administrators, and community members; local history books and articles; and statistical and demographical documents.

By including multiple data sources, it is hoped that what Geertz (1973) calls a "thick description" of the setting has emerged.

The Montage

When you try to transform the seen of the lived experience into images, you lose meanings and understandings (Berger & Mohr, 1982; Collier & Collier, 1986; Prosser, 1992). When words are transformed into written text, the gap of understanding is also widened; this time between the writer and the reader--making multiple interpretations possible, "Text can say many different things in different contexts....[because] text and context are in a continual state of tension, each defining and redefining the other, saying and doing things differently through time" (Hodder, 1994, p. 394). Obviously, in pulling together data from selected notes, documents, and historical accounts and presenting them as "facts," I am making interpretations that are fraught with problems. As Geertz (1973) points out, "writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot. They are, thus, fictions: fictions, in the sense that they are 'something made'" (p. 15). In Tuchman's (1994) questioning of just what is meant by "history, " she echoes Geertz's premise that interpretations are inventions. She asks, "What picture of the past does the historian create by her or his choice?" (p. 307). So, in considering my intentions for bringing to the foreground, information that may allow for a better understanding of the participant data, I must concede that whatever it is that I have arranged, omitted, included, and stressed are interpretations and representations of what *I* consider to be "facts." This is the problem of writing history.

Still, Tuchman suggests that social scientists "need to grasp... that the past has continuing relevance for the present" and that sometimes "we are not conscious of how history pervades our activities" (p. 313). She points out, that, in poststructural fashion, some historians are opting to present multiple perspectives of historical texts, using "historical texts as montage" (p. 316). In these instances, several accounts of the same historical event or idea are provided for the reader. This, in spite of the possibility that a "bad" montage may confuse or misinform the reader, is a particular method that attempts to share multiple points of view, and so, may somewhat reduce the power of the researcher as the omnipotent historical authority. Since, according to Manning and Cullam-Swan (1994), "social sciences have not developed systematic evaluative techniques for [qualitative] documentary analysis" (p. 463), I use the montage as a method for analyzing data to form an impressionistic story to contextualize Woody Gap School.

Telling the Tale

Van Maanen (1988) uses the term, *impressionist*, an art genre that came out of Europe during the late nineteenth century, to describe an ethnographic story-telling technique. He presents this form of writing as one that is like the art form because

> the attempt is to evoke an open, participatory sense in the viewer and as with all revisionist forms of art, to startle complacent viewers accustomed to and comfortable with older forms....The impressionists of ethnography are also out to startle their audience. But striking stories, not luminous paintings, are their stock-in-trade....The impressionist's tale is a representational means of cracking open the culture and the fieldworker's way of knowing it so that both can be jointly examined....The epistemological aim is then to braid the knower with the known. (pp. 101-102)

Through an impressionist writing of a story of Woody Gap School and its community, I present one understanding of what it might mean to live and learn in Suches, Georgia.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented my research methodology for examining how a small, rural school's educators, students, and community members perceive connections between school and community. I discussed image-based research and the role photography plays as a method for data collection. To illustrate how such research might be conducted, I described two pilot studies where I used photography as a data-collection tool. Following these sections, I described and discussed how I went about researching in the field for this dissertation: the research setting, participant selection, and the processes used for data collection and data analysis.

In the next chapter, I present a story of Woody Gap School. This story is designed to assist the reader in gaining a better understanding of the context framing the perspectives, attitudes, and sense-making of the study's participants.

CHAPTER 4

A STORY OF WOODY GAP

> If all that were true—that we in the mountains are first cousins to Al Capp's dogpatchers, then how could the little one-room school where I was raised…have produced two state supreme court justices, one chief justice, and a state school superintendent? In fact, I think it is generally conceded that no comparable region of the United States has produced as many noted men as the mountain counties of North Georgia…
>
> --Byron Herbert Reece (1917-1948)

The parking lot was overflowing. I had never seen so many cars parked around the school. As I slowly made my way down the drive, I could see groups of students, teachers, and community members strolling their way over to the little stone schoolhouse. Men dressed in sports shirts and suits with ties paced around the main entrance, quietly chatting and jingling the change in their pockets. Tonight, Woody Gap School was holding its high school graduation ceremony for its six seniors. And, for the first time in 16 years it was being held in the school's former auditorium.

It was a record turnout. It was speculated that the heavy attendance was due to three reasons. Along with the family, teachers, and friends of the graduates and those locals who turn out in support of school activities, some community members keen on seeing the old auditorium space reverted back to its original function came to experience it in its resurrected state. Another suggested reason for the overflowing numbers was that the senior class this year was considered to be an exceptionally dynamic and dedicated group of young people, highly respected by the faculty and community. And, lastly, it was presumed that people had come to hear Wes Sargenson, an Atlanta TV news anchor and *a "summer person" in Suches, slated to give this year's commencement address. He stood outside of the school's front door talking quietly with local and county school officialseventually making his way to the very stage in the auditorium where he had given a commencement speech 16 years ago, the last one, until tonight.*

Located in the center of the school, its double wooden doors swung open in greeting, this auditorium once served the school and the town as the center for a wide variety of functions. Eventually it was decided that it would house the school's media center. But now that the school was scheduled to undergo a building-wide renovation during the upcoming summer break, the media center's contents were packed up and moved to the gymnasium, leaving behind a room that was virtually unscathed and looking incredibly well-preserved. The transformation was remarkable and immediate.

Earlier in the week, standing in the doorway and surveying the large and now empty room, a group of teachers and students remarked on what they were seeing. One teacher pointed to a solid wooden door to the right: "I never knew that door was there!" Someone else commented on how big the windows looked. Another teacher explained to the group that a church had donated the baby grand piano to the school long ago (I had not even noticed the piano, it had been so covered up with files and books). The stage that had served the media center as a storage area was now cleared of its burden, looking dignified, almost stately. Some in the group began to list the many activities they had either witnessed or had heard about from older relatives and community members: cake walks, box suppers, square dances, sweetheart balls, plays, recitals, school programs, musicals, radio shows, town meetings, and, of course, graduation ceremonies. The group stood quietly. They seemed to be listening to faded voices, reciting poetry, singing simple lyrics, reading speeches, announcing honored guests, or calling in the next musical act "all the way from Gainesville, Georgia."

Beginnings

After the school renovations are completed in the upcoming fall, the media center will be returned to the auditorium (see Figures 1 and 2). Instead of them being flung open

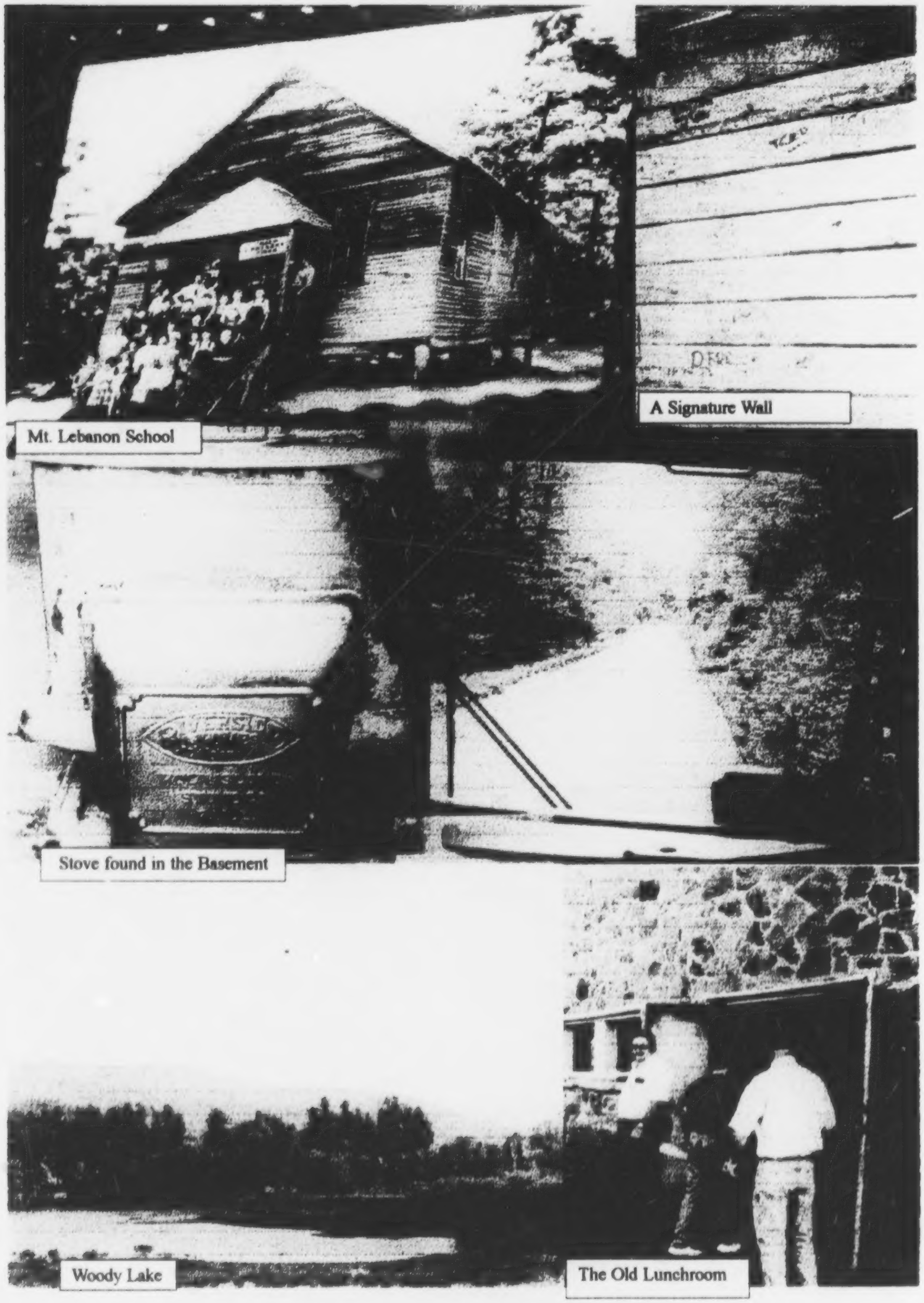


Figure 1. Beginnings Collage, Part 1

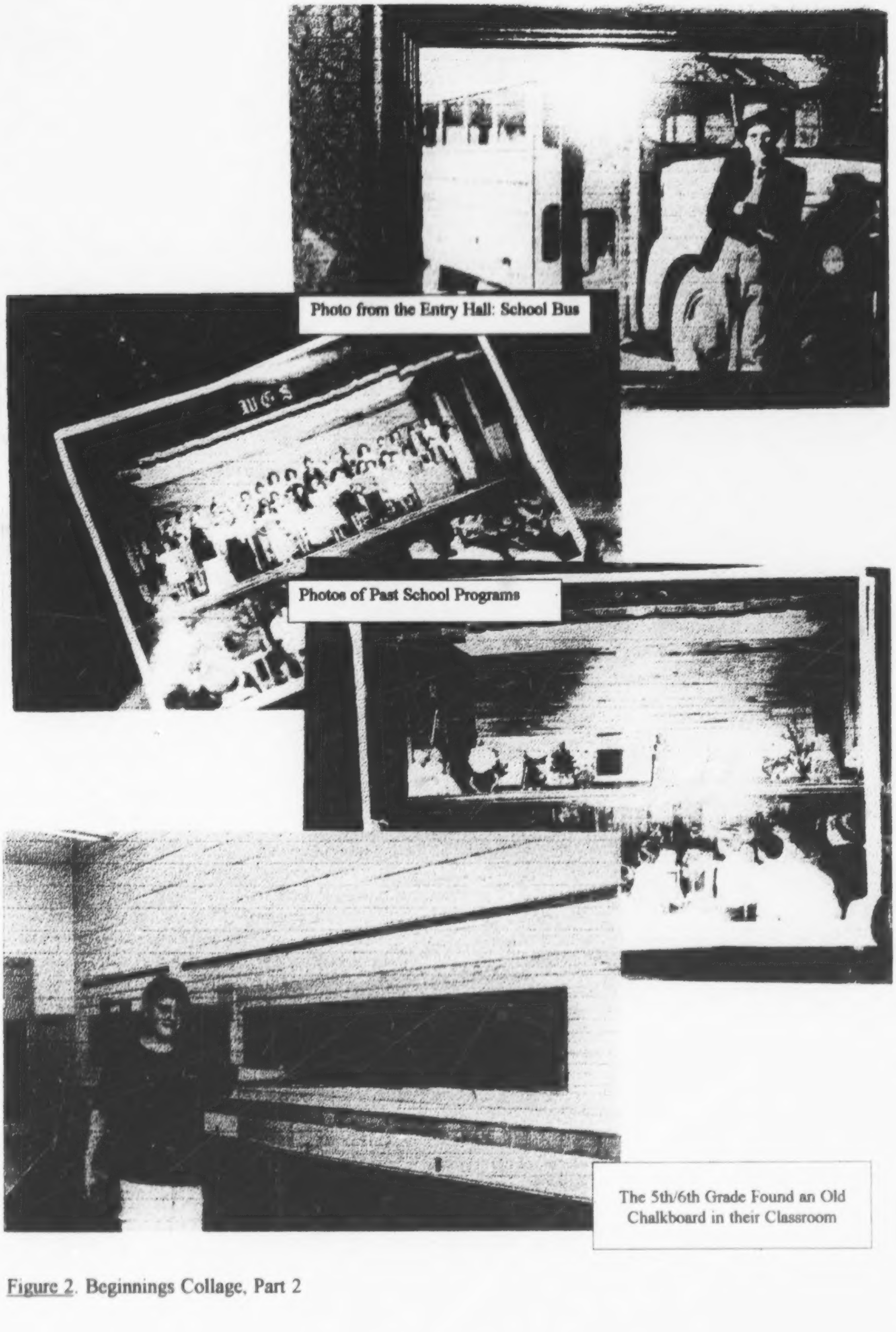


Photo from the Entry Hall: School Bus

Photos of Past School Programs

The 5th/6th Grade Found an Old Chalkboard in their Classroom

Figure 2. Beginnings Collage, Part 2

with the hope of catching a wandering breeze (as well as the occasional straying wild turkey), the new renovations will require classroom windows and school doors to remain closed, to accommodate the much needed air conditioning and new heating system. Linoleum will replace the old carpets in the main hallway (repairing the old wood floors soaked in motor oil underneath would be too costly), fixtures closely resembling the original lights will be installed, new windows will replace the older, larger ones, and a fresh coat of paint will lighten and brighten the entire school. The decisions and choices made for these renovations--what to change, how far to go, the costs, and the disruptions-- came from discussions among the staff and between the county administration. It is the hope of many of the school's staff and other community members to someday secure a grant from the National Historic Register of Historic Places and restore the school back as close as possible to its original state.

One part of the school that has not been changed throughout the years are the school's "signature walls," located behind the auditorium stage. To find them, walk up one of the two sets of steps that flank either side of the stage, into one of its two anterooms. Inside each room is a “signature wall,” made of smooth planks of wood and varnished a dark brown. Here students of at least five generations have carved or written their names, leaving their marks and their legacies. Pride emanates from students, teachers, and staff, as they scan the walls and point to the names of family members. Several students can find and read the names of their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. A heart lassos the names of one set of grandparents who carved their names as young sweethearts and, it is declared, are "married still." The dates carved into the wood by these names testify to the succession of generations that have attended Woody Gap School. Students' familiarity with these carved names testifies to their present connection to the past and a strong sense of place and belonging for many.

Early Days of Schooling in Suches

In 1895, there were 49 white schools and one “Negro” school in Union County. All of these schools were housed in either one, two, or three-room schoolhouses or in local churches (Collins & Devereaux, 1976). It seems that the proliferation of schools was in part due to

> an early enactment of legislation for schools [by a] progressive citizenry [that] migrated into the area from the north and south prior to the establishment of the county in 1832 and immediately after this date. They brought with them at least some knowledge of schools and learning with their desire to escape the aristocracy of other sections of the country. (pp. 27-28)

Thought by some to be named after the "union-like men who reside in it" (*Archives of Union County*, 2000), Union County was created in 1832, along with nine other counties, out of Cherokee County the last major American Indian land holding in Georgia. In his treatise, *Bill's Guide to Suches*, Miller (2000) tells his readers that

> this is serious Cherokee country. Throughout the area the Cherokees lived and fished and hunted. "Suches" in fact, was the name of a prominent Cherokee, some say a chief….Like the mountains and forests, the Cherokee civilization was mature and peaceful at the time that Andrew Jackson ripped its people from their homes in 1838. (pp. 8-9)

Under the orders of President Andrew Jackson and the management of General Winfield Scott, most of the Cherokees in these mountains were organized for relocation to Oklahoma, an exodus known as the Trail of Tears. An excerpt from Shuler's (1953) poem, "At Mt. Yonah's Foot" explains:

> *Rich treasures the tribe then found*
> *In the region of the Chestatee,*
> *It was yellow metal in the ground,*
> *They said here our home will ever be;*
> *About the gold the white men learned,*
> *And for it their hearts then yearned,*
> *Then there was sent forth a decree*
> *For the Cherokees to leave Georgia.* (p. xi)

As the Cherokees were being removed, white settlers, mostly poor migrants dreaming of gold and land, arrived in the area to confiscate lands and set up homesteads. The census for Union County taken in 1845 shows that education in the area and the county was at a "low ebb. The funds for education were $737.20 [$1.15 per student]. There was a dire need for efficient teachers for the county and the 850 poor children" (Collins & Devereaux, 1976, p. 18). By 1887, the funds for schooling Union County students had more than tripled to $2567.56. But, there were now 2280 white students and 28 "colored" students enrolled in schools within the county (an average of $1.11 per student, assuming that funds were equally distributed--an unlikely case among black, white, town, and rural populations). In two years, enrollment jumped to 2700 white and 57 black students and the budget had more than doubled. As a matter of fact, the County School Commissioner at that time, Mr. F. G. Duncan, reported to the Grand Jury that the total paid out was $5,278.89 although the amount budgeted was $5,275.91 ($1.91 per student). "Leaving no balance on hand, but I have paid out of my own money $2.98" (Collins & Devereaux, 1976, pp. 32-33). Now schools were springing up all over Union County. Schools with names like Track Rock, Ivy Log, Shady Grove, Pleasant Hill, Lickskillet, Wild Boar Institute, Blood Mountain, and Choestoe (p. 32).

Born in 1886, Edward Shuler (1953) described growing up in the Choestoe district of Union County. He attended Hood School, one of Union County's 50 or so schools and located only a few miles from the Suches community. One of his reminisces is an account of the impromptu jaunts taken by the boys and their new teacher to a local swimming hole.

> It was not long till we boys commenced having our best time with our young teacher at the Blue Hole, on the Nottely [River]. While all of the larger boys in Hood community had already learned to swim, many of the smaller boys had never mustered up enough courage to wade into the deep hole of the Nottely, where the water was over our heads....But even the smaller boys greatly confided in our young school teacher, and no longer was it necessary for any one to be

> overpowered by a larger boy and be hurled, like a rock, into the Blue Hole or the mill pond....Our young school teacher always stood by the water in an anxious mood of mind and he was ready to dive into the water to rescue any boy who showed signs of drowning. (p. 52)

Shuler compares this progressive teacher to the sterner, less tolerant teachers of his early years. This teacher did not use corporal punishment when his students failed to answer a question correctly. Instead, he urged students to think and to struggle. Play was encouraged as way to work off excess energy and as a method for learning the rules of fairplay and sportsmanship. Students were freer to voice their preferences for academic studies. For example, Shuler and his peers had a keen interest in the business and geology of gold mining. They were encouraged to work harder for their own sake, not the teacher's:

> During bookstime [sic][the teacher] often sat in the midst of the girls in the schoolhouse, aiding them with their studies. At the same time, the large boys sat on a long bench outside of the schoolhouse under the shade of a spreading oak tree.... "Use your minds," the young teacher told us while we studied arithmetic. "Delve into your problems. Make many trials to solve difficult problems before you give up." After we worked our problems in arithmetic, we read interesting stories in our readers, hunted for answers to questions we found in our geography books, and studied grammar and physiology. We then received pleasant smiles from the large girls who sat next to the windows in the schoolhouse, and we wrote love notes and placed them in the hands of the girls, who let their hands hang outside of the windows. Such an act, always before forbidden, went either unnoticed by our young teacher or it met with his approval. (p. 52)

Shuler later attended Young Harris College, Mercer University, and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He taught schools for 33 years and ministered to 25 small Baptist churches. A great many teachers, politicians, doctors, and bankers hailed from Union County during the first half of the century, including M. D. Collins, State School

Superintendent for 25 years, laureate poet Byron Herbert Reece, and former Governor Zell Miller (Shuler, 1953; Collins & Devereaux, 1976).

Consolidation of these area schools began sometime between the 1920s and 1930s. According to the Union County Heritage Book Committee (1994), the first school consolidation in Union County was in 1932: five one-room schools were merged to create Towns Creek School. Another account states that Windy Hill School was "brought into" the Blairsville Collegiate Institute (later, Blairsville High School) in 1925 (Collins & Devereaux, 1976). Its principal, in his Ford truck, collected and transported his students to the school. This combination truck-bus could be jacked up and with a belt placed on its tires, be converted into a saw for cutting firewood for the school. In 1932 and 1933, a few students from the Suches community attempted to finish high school. They attended Blairsville High School and endured "one of the longest school bus routes in the United States" (p. 35).

Although it is now the smallest K-12 school in the State of Georgia, Woody Gap School is also a product of consolidation. In 1939, the one and two room schools in the Suches community--Coopers Creek, Corinth, Mt. Airy, Mt. Lebanon, Peggy Hale, Spriggs Chapel, Valley, Zion--were merged to form Woody Gap School (Annual Staff, 1991; Collins & Devereaux, 1976; Union County Heritage Book Committee, 1994). Four of these seven schools were in churches. One of the schools consolidated was the Corinth School. Clyde Hawkins, a former student of Corinth School, graduate of Woody Gap School, and current resident of Suches, described his experiences:

> It took two teachers to keep order and teach about forty students in our new school building [1931]. Except for the older ones, all [were] barefooted. Many walked two or three miles each way. Discipline was strict, particularly with Jenna McDougald. You received no second chance with her. If you broke the rules or caused a disturbance, you were whipped right then and there, right in front of the class. This would be just the beginning. On our honor, we would have to tell our

> parents. Probably a few more licks were added by our parents. (Union County Heritage Book Committee, 1994, section 32)

Coopers Creek School was held in the Coopers Creek Church from 1847 to 1934. Grades one through seven were taught in a single room as described by Turner and Parker (1999):

> A heater was in the middle of the room and the teacher's desk was located at the front of the room. Facing this desk was an old church bench where students were called by grade level to receive their lessons for the day. If you had a question, it was asked the next day, as you didn't dare interrupt the teacher. Students were expected to behave. If they didn't, they were subject to receive a little "hickory tea" from one of the switches kept in the corner. (p. 56)

Eventually, all of these little schools held in churches and one and two room buildings, peppered among the mountains, valleys, and knobs in Union County, would be consolidated into a few much larger schools. Woody Gap School was one of these "larger" schools, built to serve the inhabitants of "The Valley Above the Clouds."

A Community Builds Its School

In 1938, the residents of Suches began to organize the resources necessary to create a central school. Under the leadership of Walter Woody and his father Arthur, funds from the county ($5,000) and a local bond ($10,000) were set aside to begin the financing of construction (Woody Gap School, 1998). Woody Gap School was built as a WPA (Works Progress Administration) project on 20 acres of land purchased and donated by the Woody's (Raudonis, 1998; Union County Heritage Book Committee, 1994). The school was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps and community members out of locally donated timber and quarried stone from nearby Woody Lake.

Woody Gap School was dedicated and opened on November 30, 1940, on land that once belonged to Joseph Emerson Brown, the Confederate Governor of Georgia. Fifteen Hundred people attended the opening ceremony (Annual Staff, 1991), including Governor-Elect Eugene Talmadge, County School Superintendent Frank Shuler, Arthur

Woody, and State School Superintendent M. D. Collins. The North Georgia College Band played the National Anthem for the crowd. Grades 1-11 reported for classes in January 1941. In addition,

> Free state-owned schoolbooks were provided to the school. A library was set up from a collection of books brought from the old schools. Two hundred fifty students enrolled at the school. Many students walked to school while others rode a school bus. The school bus was a privately owned 1939 pickup. Students had certain jobs they performed. The boys had to cut and carry wood in for the heaters. The students cleaned the school and oiled the floors. (p. 137)

Under the direction of two cooks from the local Conservation Corps Camp (C. C. Camp), local families in the community provided food and prepared and served meals out of the basement of the school until a lunchroom was built in 1954. An article in the school-community paper described what lunch at the time was like:

> The basement had to have several alterations before it could be used to serve lunch to the students. Mr. Jackson, Woody Gap's principal, had sawdust placed on the dirt floor of the basement. High school boys built picnic tables and benches from lumber provided by the county. The C C camps [sic] donated an army stove.
>
> Many problems plagued the new lunchroom. Among them is the fact that the basement doesn't have a finished ceiling. Another is that outlet pipes for the stove get full of soot and must be cleaned each week. Also, smoke [would fill] the basement many times when the wind changes. The basement [wa]s also very damp and uncomfortable. Also water had to be carried from a spring below the school. Carrying water [wa]s most time consuming for the cooks.
>
> Mr. John Marr and Mr. Jim Jarrard, owners of the Marr-Jarrard Store, [bought] produce wholesale from Gainesville, supplies for the lunches. Also, Mr. Jackson hired a truck to bring W.P.A. produce from Blairsville. The PTA also contributed to the lunchroom. They held box suppers, sponsored showing of movies at Woody Gap, and sponsored other activities to raise funds to pay for

> food. Lunches cost five cents per student. Produce [could] be exchanged for lunches. The meals were nutritious, well balanced, and hot. A typical lunch included such things as potatoes, beans, whole wheat bread, and cookies and grapefruit juice. ("Lunchroom Housed in Basement," 1984-85, p. 7)

Two students graduated from Woody Gap that first year. They attended graduation exercises in nearby Blairsville. The first high school graduation exercises at Woody Gap School were held for nine seniors on May 18, 1942 (Annual Staff, 1991). In 1949 the Veterans Education Program was put in place. Its purpose was to educate those veterans who had had their schooling interrupted by service during World War II (Annual Staff). The twelfth grade was added to the school program in 1951, so no graduation ceremony was necessary that year.

In 1955, the new lunchroom was ready for use. "The brick building consisted of a kitchen, dining hall, administrative offices and storage rooms" (Annual Staff, 1991, p. 58). Over the years, community members continued to contribute to Woody Gap's facilities, assisting in fundraising and construction of a ballfield, bleachers, gymnasium, vocational building, outdoor stage, picnic pavilion, concessions stand, and tennis courts (Union County Heritage Book Committee, 1994; Woody Gap School, 1998).

The Valley Above the Clouds

Like all the other graduation nights at Woody Gap, tonight's facilities for graduation are cooled without the luxury of air conditioning. As more and more folks make their way into the auditorium, the temperature begins to rise. It is a full house. Fans hum quietly in the corners. Patiently waiting patrons pump their programs back and forth past their faces. Small sweaty children crawl over their mommas' and daddies' warm laps or try to escape down the aisles. Some people just can't sit still. They find themselves out in the main hallway or front porch, pacing back and forth, kidding with nervous soon-to-be-graduates lining up for the impending processional, having a quick smoke, greeting new arrivals, or following after little ones toddling down the hallway. The waiting seniors fiddle with their mortarboards and honor sashes. They take photos of *each other and smile and wave at familiar faces in the auditorium. Inside, it was becoming obvious that the two back rows reserved for faculty would be needed for newly arriving groups. Teachers gracefully retreat to stand in the hall near the entrance and fetch additional chairs to be placed along the central aisle. The front entrance doors are propped open and frame a cooler scene. Looking out onto the lawn, I can see the light of day fading as I hear cicadas and frogs begin their nightly trilling and barking. Across the highway, the grassy hill that supports the Volunteer Fire Station and Big Rock Clinic fills the picture. I step out through the door. Sloping grassy fields and not-too-distant mountaintops surround me. A soothing breeze blows across my face as I turn to go back in, the sounds of a piano greeting me.*

At an elevation of around 3,000 feet, the unincorporated town of Suches is a geographic location replete with waterfalls, rivers, ridges, mountains, and winding country lanes (see Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6). It has enough rolling cleared land to provide for small-scale farming, cattle grazing, and scenic vistas. Divided loosely into three "districts," Gaddistown, Cooper Creek, and Canada, the community is without definite boundaries. It encompasses a large area extending from the school northwestward to the Fannin county line, northward to Wolf Pen Gap, and southward to the Lumpkin County line (Woody Gap School/Suches Community Media Center Project, 1998). Suches is surrounded by five mountains: Black Mountain, Big Cedar Mountain, Slaughter Mountain, Rocky Mountain, and Blood Mountain (personal communication, April 29, 1999, Brasstown Bald, U.S. Forest Service Office); it has the highest elevation of any active community in Georgia (Harrell, 1986).

Most traffic into Suches comes from the south on Highway 60. The Stone Pile Gap, the grave of the Cherokee princess Trahlyta located in the middle of the intersection of Highways 19 and 60, marks the start of a seven-mile ascent up into the mountains, beginning with Cedar Mountain. On a clear day in winter or early spring, this road provides incredible views of large stretches of the terrain below. During fall season the changing colors of the mountain foliage are spectacular enough to bring hordes of "leaf

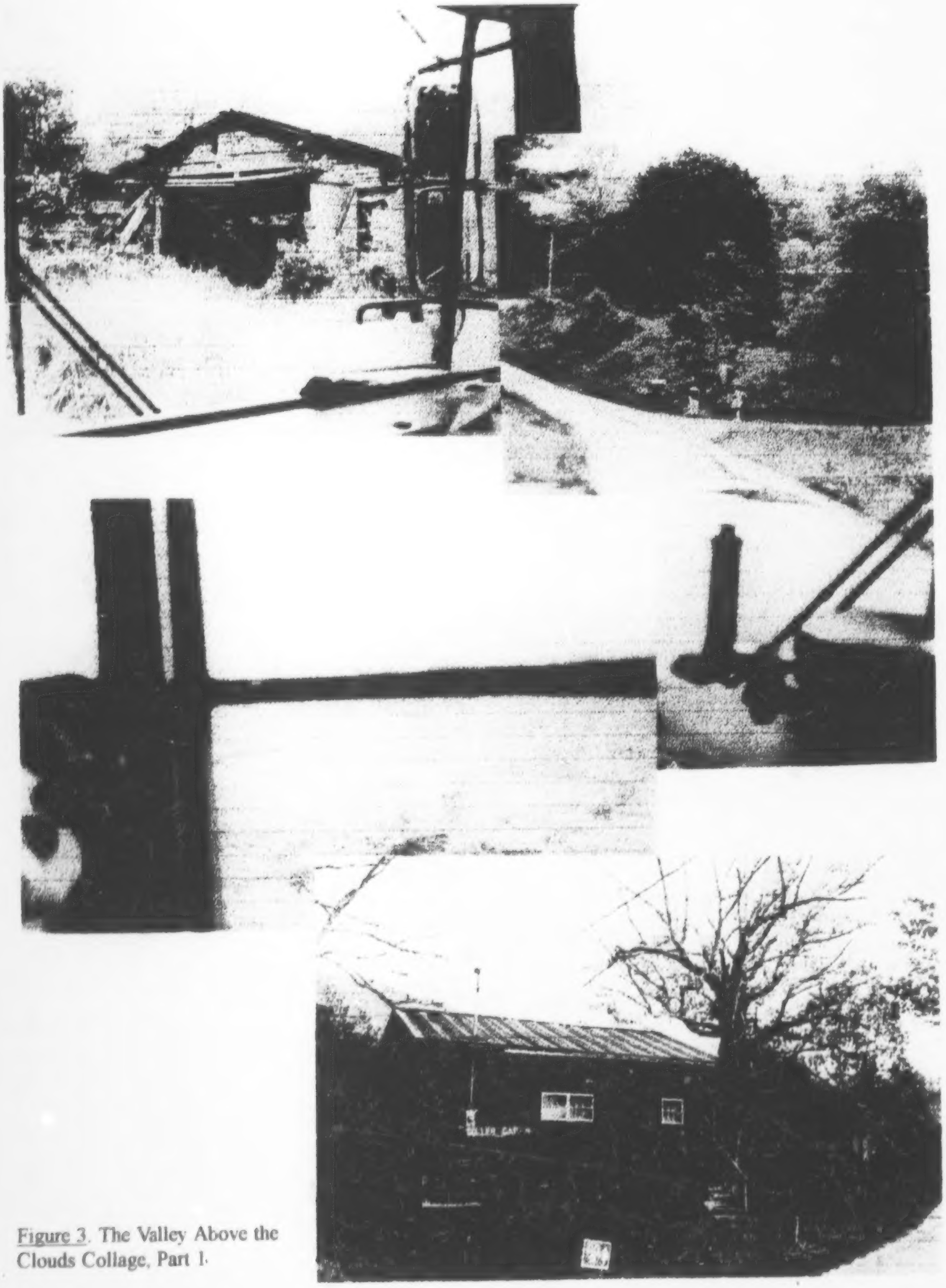


Figure 3. The Valley Above the Clouds Collage, Part 1.

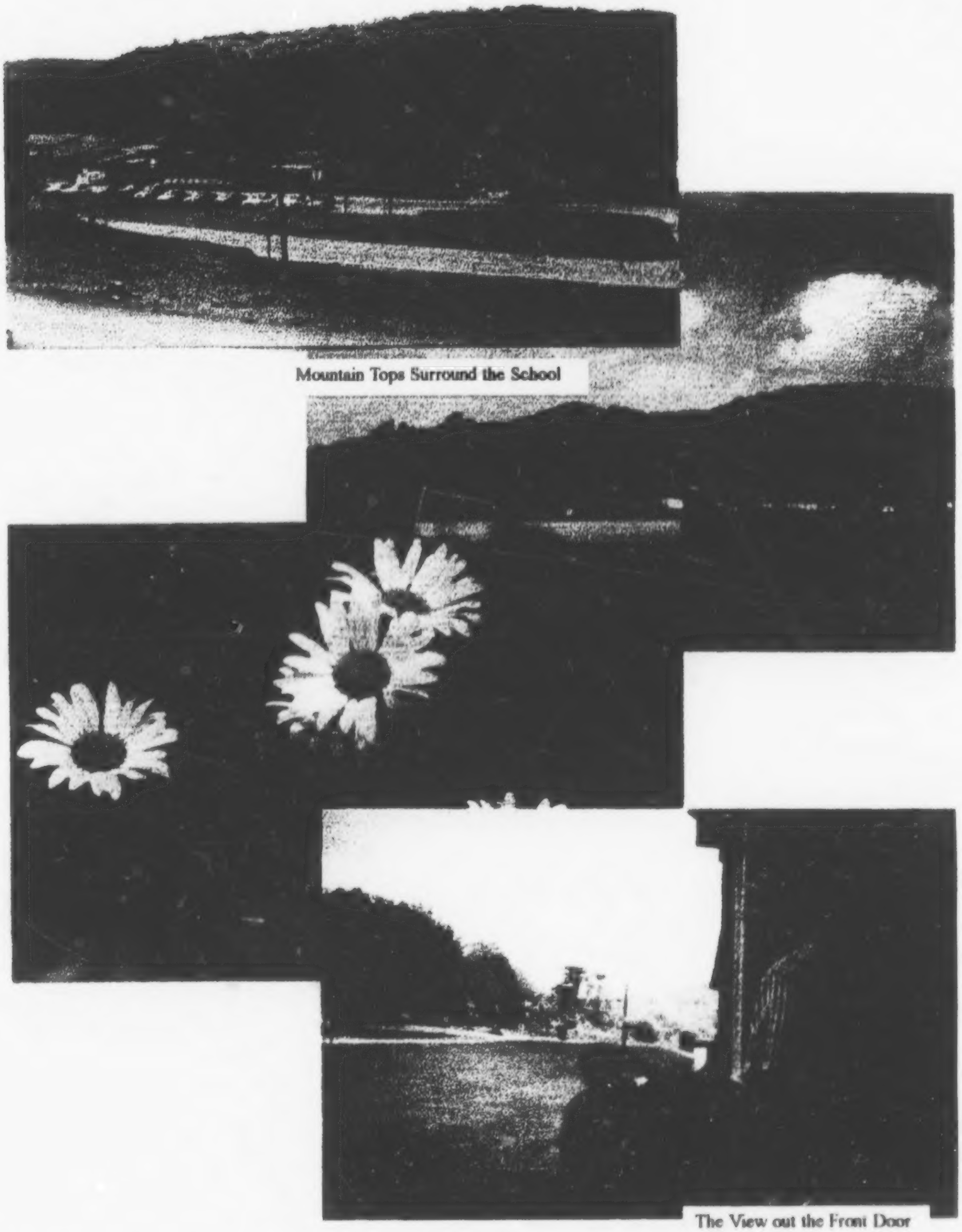

Mountain Tops Surround the School
The View out the Front Door

Figure 4. The Valley Above the Clouds Collage, Part 2

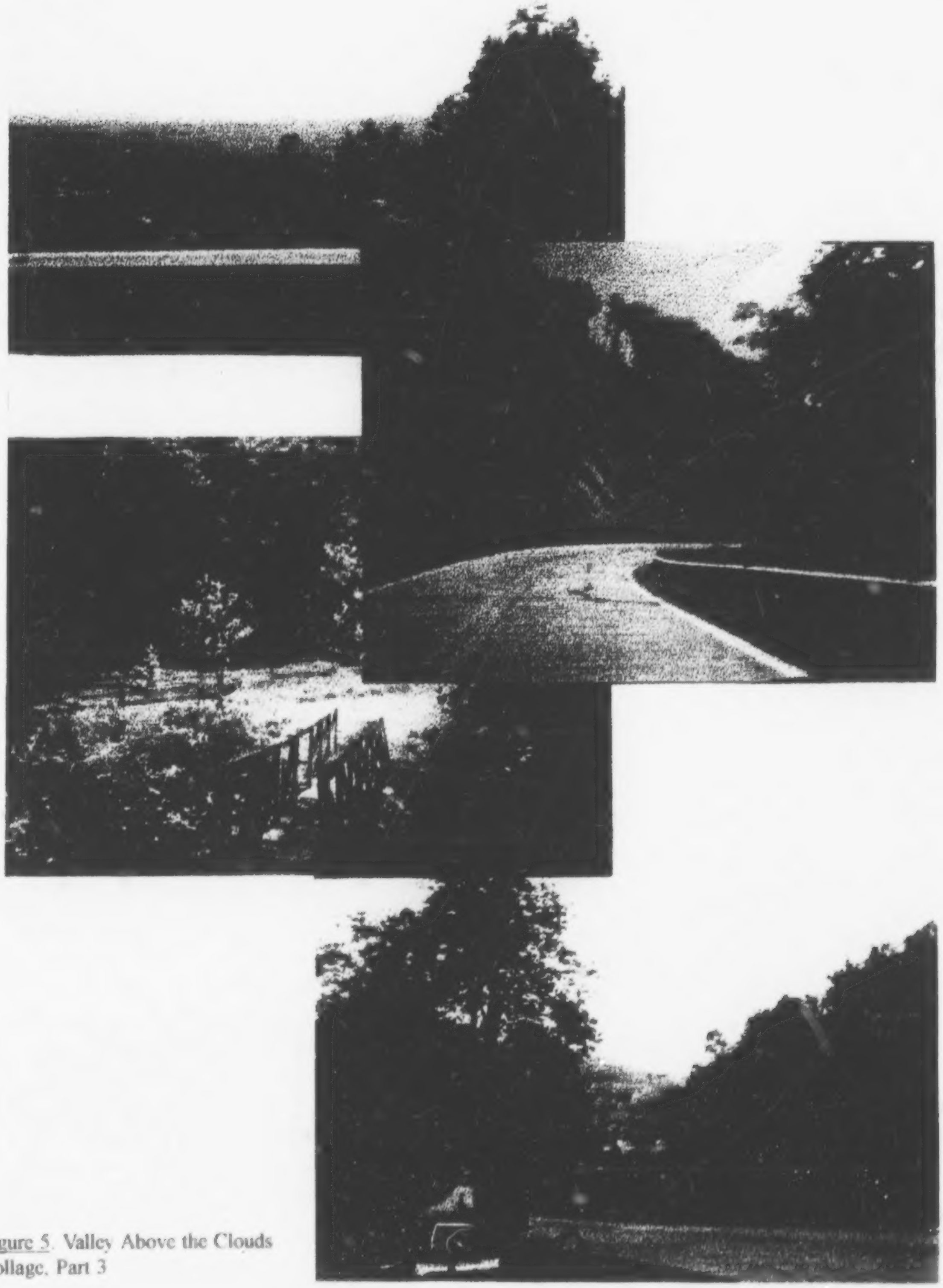


Figure 5. Valley Above the Clouds Collage, Part 3

View Out the Front Window of the School

The Two-Wheel Only Motorcycle Resort in Suches

Plaque Hanging in the Woody Gap School Gym Honoring Sheriff Harlan Duncan

PrincessTrahlyta's Burial Site Stone Pile Gap)

Figure 6. Valley Above the Clouds Collage, Part 4

peepers" to make the steep slow drive. During the spring and summer seasons the warmth stimulates vivid greens and the growth of a variety of wildflowers growing off the hills so closely to the road, you can almost reach out your car window and touch them. With spring also comes the motorcyclists, many heading for the motorcycle resort in Suches. Their presence on the road can add an element of "excitement" to driving in the area--you never know when you might meet an enthusiastic "flatlander" coming from the opposite direction and in your lane.

Driving to Suches requires concentration and a good grip on the wheel. Until one acquires the necessary "sea legs," it is advisable to not drive with an empty stomach: the continuous swaying back and forth with every curve and bend can make one quite green around the gills by the journey's end. Fog is also a major problem in this area. It is not uncommon for the sun to be shining at the beginning of one's drive, only to have it quickly disappear as thick fog envelopes the car, slowing one to a crawl of around seven or eight miles per hour. Ice and snow are additional and serious obstacles to traversing the mountains to Suches, a fact made more real when one observes the lack of roadside shoulders and the unprotected ledges that lead to a shear drop off of many hundreds of feet!

The ascent peaks at Woody Gap (elevation 3,150 feet), part of the Appalachian Trail. From that point, the drive begins a gentle descent into the "Valley Above the Clouds" or Suches. Woody Gap School is in the southern part of Union County known as the Canada District. It is part of "Downtown Suches" (Appendix A) This is a sparse business district that includes an automotive repair shop, a real estate agency, the volunteer fire department, Big Rock Clinic, Suches General Store, Two Wheels Only Motorcycle Resort, and the post office. A right turn at the intersection of Highway 60 and Highway 180 leads to

> a wonderful drive, especially if you enjoy car sickness. For the first few miles the ridgeline to your right is literally the grade profile of the Appalachian Trail. Around seven miles along you'll reach Lake Winfield Scott, where the AT takes a

> right through Slaughter Gap toward Blood Mountain. The simple but perfect beauty of Winfield Scott is awe-inspiring. Further along 180, you'll climb through Wolf Pen Gap, where the Duncan Trail Crosses. A few queasy miles later, 180 appears to dead end at 19/129. A left will take you toward Blairsville… (Miller, 2000, pp. 15-16)

Because the treacherous roads leading in and out of the area to Blairsville are steep and the winding cutbacks carved out of the mountains are often impassable in the winter, Woody Gap School has been designated a Georgia isolated school since 1974. Every so often a move to consolidate it with the other schools in Union County materializes. But efforts to join these schools are abandoned after the powers that be discover what consolidation would mean for students:

> After they toured the school, the state officials were put on a school bus to Blairsville, which is where the students would have to go if Woody Gap was closed. The driver took off down Black Mountain. After 26 miles of precipitous cutbacks and gear grinding, the state officials decided no one, and certainly not schoolchildren, should have to undergo such a commute. (Cawthorn, 1988, p. A1)

Several of Woody Gap's staff live in Blairsville and commute to the school. A lunchtime conversation with a group of commuters revealed just how treacherous this ride can be. One teacher spoke of a time she was driving up the narrow road to work. It was so foggy, she lost her orientation on the road. She had to stop and wait for the fog to burn off for fear she would drive off the side of the mountain. Another time, it snowed on the road, although it was not snowing in Suches or Blairsville. The snow was so thick, teachers en route to school had to stop and wait for help from the school to lead them out to safety. The intensity of the ride to Blairsville is exaggerated when it is by bus. Add the jostling and swaying that comes with such a large vehicle, chatter, fog, slick roads, and the inability to see most of the narrow shoulders from such an elevated perch, and you have a nerve-wracking adventure, as a journal entry attests:

> I rode on the bus [to Blairsville] with the middle school and the high school kids. I sat next to Ms. M. and we both sat in front of Mr. M. and Mr. B. The bus was full—two kids per seat, except for two seats of three students. The path from Woody Gap was down the dreaded 180 to Blairsville. This is the ride that WGS students would take each day, to and from school, if the school was ever consolidated with the county seat schools. I hate this ride. It is pretty easy going the first five miles until you reach Lake Winfield Scott. Then you are on a real roller-coaster ride for the next 8 or so miles. The ride becomes even more hair-raising when you are on a school bus AND it is rainy and foggy. I have to admit that I spent part of the trip mentally "helping" Mr. G. drive the bus. For the most part, the kids paid no attention to the ride; they are quite accustomed to the winds and turns, but there were several times when even they became quiet and attentive to the road. When I am on that road, I think about those Hot Wheels tracks that are multileveled and have lots of "s" and "u" turns in the tracks. The strangest thing was that I didn't have motion sickness ON the bus, but after a few minutes back in the school that afternoon, I was so queasy, I went home. The teachers picked up on my uneasiness and proceeded to tell me gruesome stories of crashes and motion sickness that could have easily produced vomit of projectile magnitude, but I hung in there, persevering until I stumbled off the bus that afternoon. Ms. M. pointed out that the kids were impervious to the rolls and turns of the mountain roads, but put them on an interstate, going 70 miles an hour, and they will sit up straight with concern! All in all, the ride on the bus was absolutely exhausting and I would think forcing students to make that ride on a daily basis would be tantamount to child abuse. (Sampson, 2000, April 25)

There is slim chance that the conditions that create the isolation of the Suches community and Woody Gap School will change in the near future. Wilderness areas and national forests surround the community.

> If you look at a map of the Chattahoochee National Forest, you'll see you are surrounded by it. This is perhaps Suches' primary defining characteristic: something like 90% of the area is uninhabited, essentially wild, inviolable National Forest. No Dollywood, no water parks, no antique malls, no McDonald's, no petting zoos. (Miller, 2000, p. 6)

Despite the scattering of its population, for the last 60 years the school has provided a central location for bringing the far-flung families and residents of Suches together for social, political, and economic activities and issues.

The Little Rock School House

Looking back through the front entrance doors, I can see the seniors lining up to enter the auditorium and take the stage. The lights dim. People take their seats, readying themselves for the beginning of tonight's program. Fanfare erupts from the piano, and the gowned seniors begin a dignified processional walk down the aisle. Teachers, babysitters, and a few lingering attendees amass around the entrance of the auditorium, jockeying for position to see the stage. Instead of joining them, I step back to look at the school. Set close to Highway 60, this little rock school house looks more like a home than a public institution. The center of the long narrow building has an arched entrance with a peaked roof overhead. The walkway sloping up to the door replaces the original stone steps so as to comply with the American with Disabilities Act. Three tall multi-paned windows framed either side of the front door. The school flag flutters under the words "Woody Gap High School," strung across the top of the entrance. Just inside the door is the entrance hall to the school. To the right, is the principal's office and the school secretary's office with a window for greeting visitors and conducting business. Opposite the principal's office is the office of the guidance counselor and a combination faculty lounge, workroom, and restroom, small and modest. On the walls in the entrance hall are framed photos and plaques. Modest comfortable chairs and an end table with a lamp and reading material greet visitors and family members. Straight ahead is the auditorium-turned-media-center. Past the entrance hall are two halls leading to classrooms, one to *the left and one to the right. There are eight classrooms in the main building. Instead of closed and locked lockers along the hallway, there are open cubbies with pegs underneath for hanging coats and jackets. Inside the cubbies, an array of items can be found like work boots, plastic cups, tee shirts, artwork, flowers, barrettes, tupperware, gym shorts, and school papers. The halls' planked walls are painted a light blue and the floors are thinly carpeted. To the left, down to the end of the hall, the door leads to the outside and to the immediate right, the boy's bathroom. Down the steps and into the lunchroom building is the kindergarten class on the right. Large shiny refrigerators are ahead, across from the lunchroom door. Next is the tiny In-School Suspension room (rarely used) and further down the hall is the custodian's supply room and office. On the left side of the building is the lunchroom. A plain, yet inviting space that is light-filled and clean.*

Continuing through the building to the outside, another building houses the gym. This is where graduation ceremonies are usually held. Now, it is filled with the contents of the school, moved here as the school prepares for its renovations. Beyond the gym is "Egypt" (called so because it is "as far as Egypt"), a building that is the newest on campus and farthest from the main building. It contains the woodshop, the vocational classroom, a greenhouse, and a couple of other high school classrooms. Behind this string of buildings is open land with the school's playground, ball field, tennis courts, creek, beehives, pavilion, garden, and outdoor stage sprinkled on it.

I wander about: back to the main building, past the swing set and the log playhouse toward some tall hedges that mark the school's western boundary. Looking away from the hedge and behind me, I spy a wide rock staircase leading into the building. The trees and shrubs on either side of the steps are overgrown and seem almost protective of the entry. The thick slabs of stone look ancient, with layers of lichens and bright green moss spotting the sides. I immediately think of some old photos I had recently seen of one and two-room schoolhouses. In the photos were small groups of children and their teachers, perched on similar looking steps, waiting patiently to have *their portraits made. These steps seemed made for that very purpose. They were wide, deep, and solid, looking more like bleachers than steps. You could almost hear the children's voices from many years ago, calling to each other as they scampered up and over the steps, a favorite place to play.*

Leaving the area, I walk behind the building again. This time, I notice a gray rock, the size of a grapefruit, on the ground. It is a piece of the schoolhouse. I hold it in my hand and look up at the carcass of the building, trying to figure where the rock belonged. I spy a long fissure running up the center wall and wince as I see its "wound." It had probably appeared sometime when the ground shifted under the weight of the building. Rather than just a pointed stone, the rock in my hand seemed more like a giant scale recently shed or torn from the kindly, old gray creature in front of me. I gently carry the stone in, hoping to give to someone who would see to it that it was properly reattached.

Woody Gap School is the last K-12 school in the state of Georgia (see Figures 7, 8, 9, and 10). At the time of this study it was also Georgia's smallest school. In the past, this little rock schoolhouse nestled within the community it serves has enrolled as many as 280 students at a time. But the attraction of Atlanta jobs, a slowing mountain economy, an influx of retirees, and a lower birthrate have resulted in a declining enrollment. For the last ten years, student numbers have hovered annually at around 100 schoolwide (Woody Gap School, 1998).

Most of the parents of the students of Woody Gap School are graduates of the school. One report (Gipe, 1997) states that many make a living by working at a local fish hatchery, timbering, grazing cattle, raising hogs, keeping bees, working in neighboring textile or chicken-processing plants, or by making the long commute to Atlanta. A study conducted by the Leavell Center for Evangelism and Church Growth (LCEC) (1998) on the Suches area reported statistical data on race, age, household size and type, marital status, occupation, income, and education. The study organized data into categories that represented "socio-economic categories corresponding to today's lifestyles" (LCEC, p.

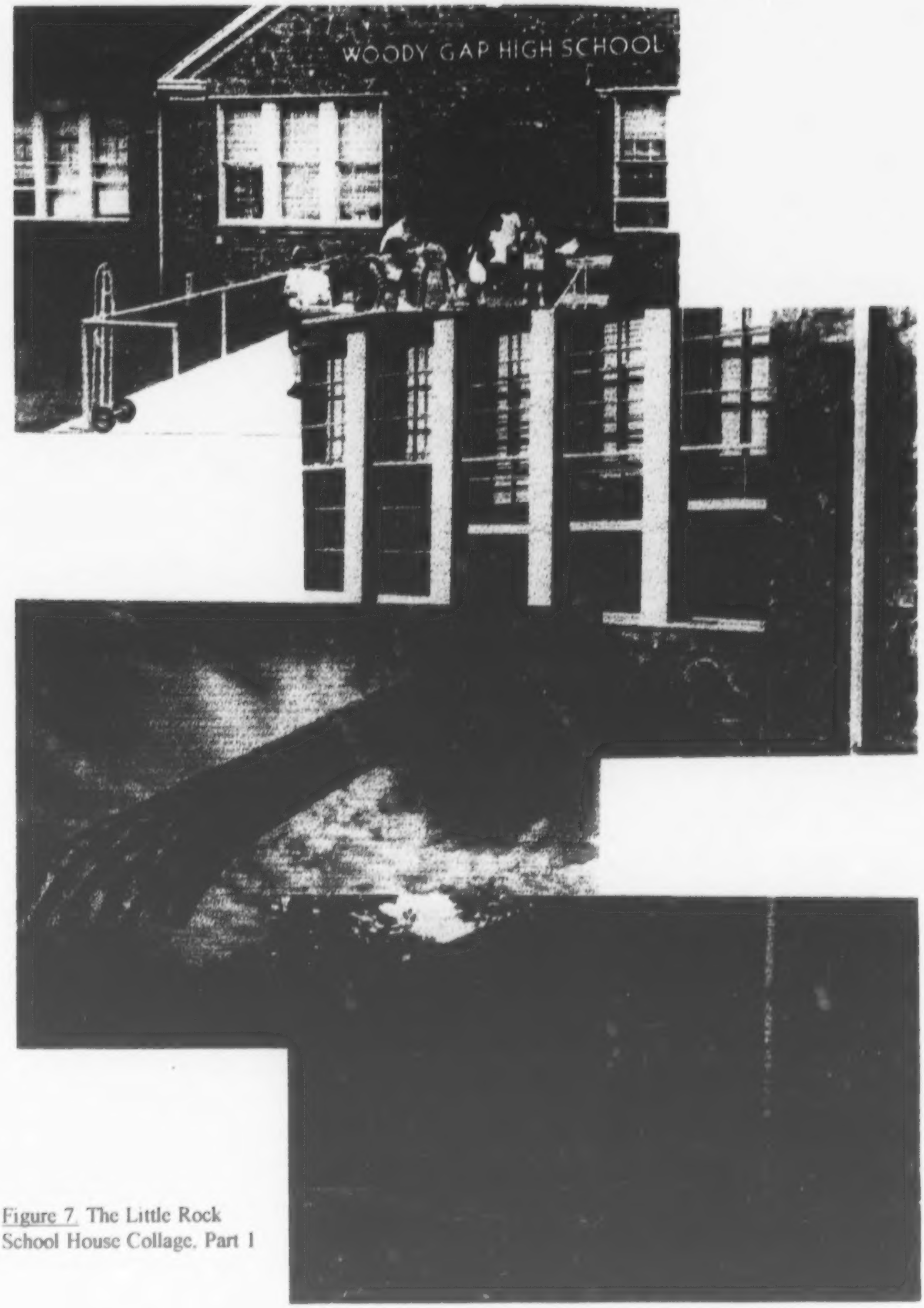


Figure 7. The Little Rock School House Collage, Part 1

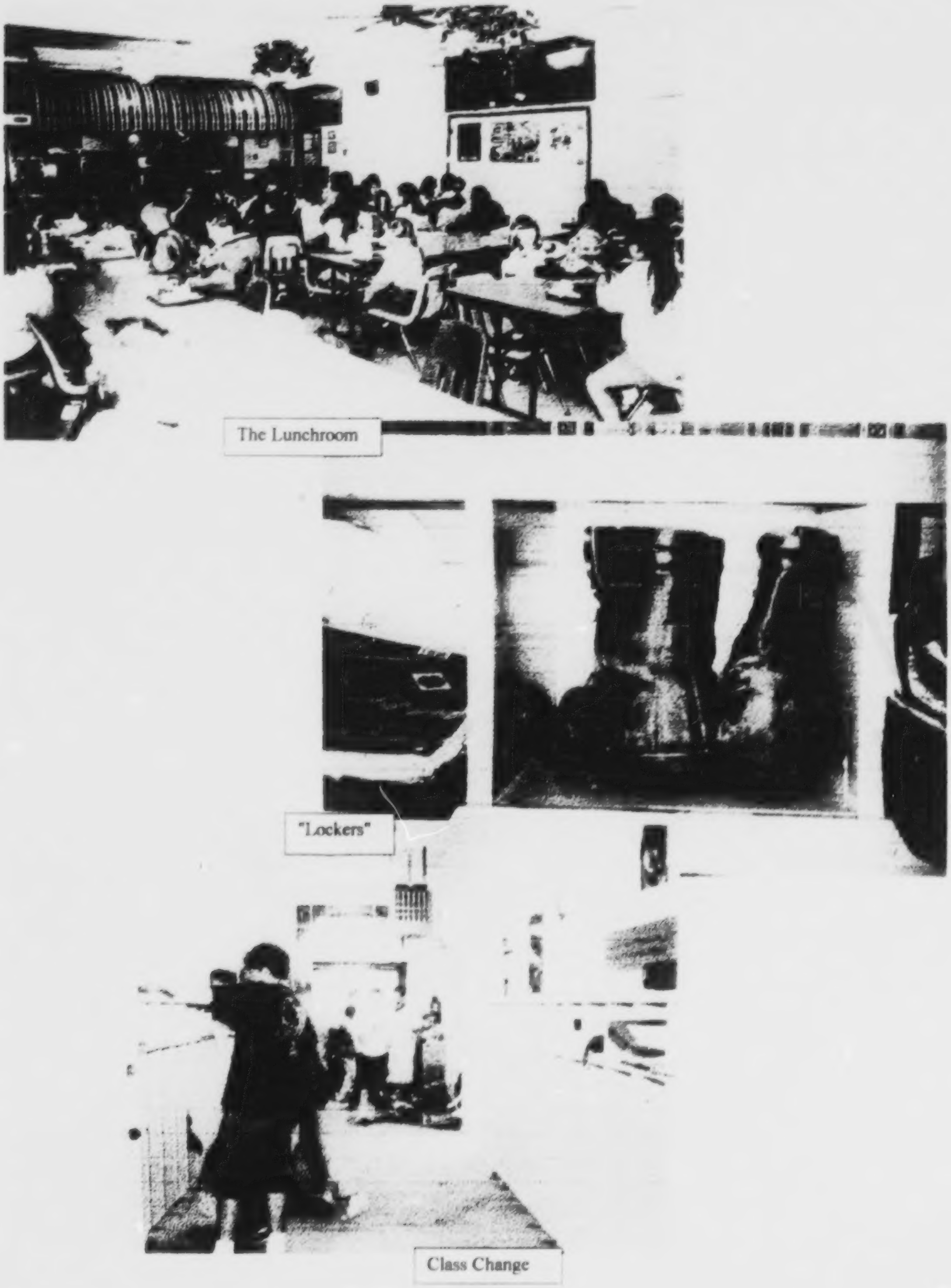


Figure 8. The Little Rock School House Collage, Part 2

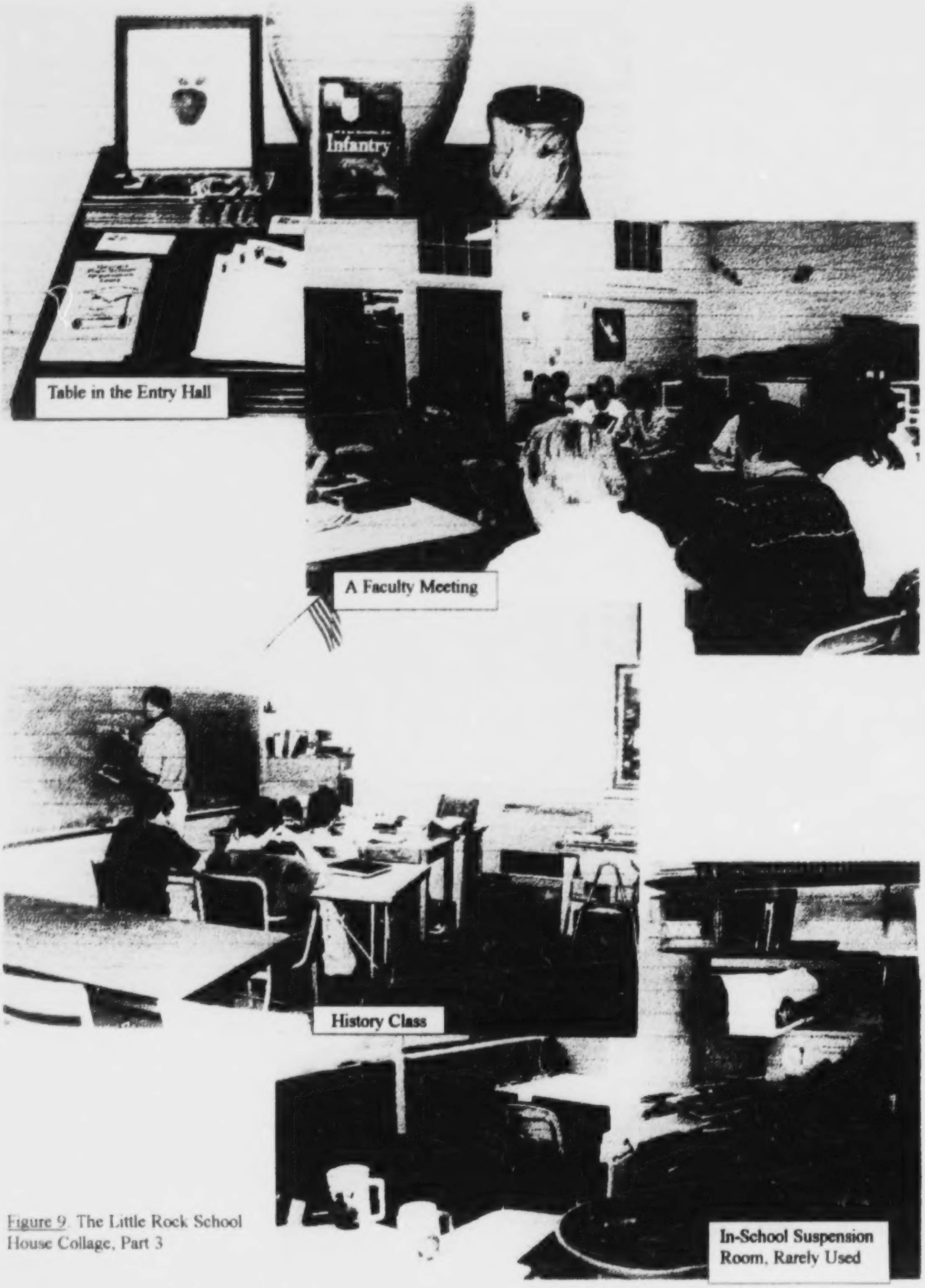


Table in the Entry Hall

A Faculty Meeting

History Class

In-School Suspension Room, Rarely Used

Figure 9. The Little Rock School House Collage, Part 3

High Schoolers Cheer During the End-of-the-Year Parade

Lunch

Students of Different Ages Read a Map Together

High School Teachers Visit with Preschoolers

Figure 10. The Little Rock School House Collage, Part 4

15). Using data collected in 1996, the study found that a majority of Suches households fell into the following "lifestyle" categories:

Rustic Elders (37.2%). Defined as low-income, older rural couples.

Grain Belt (37%). This group is comprised of farm owners and tenants.

Hard Scrabble (9.1%). These are older families in poor, isolated areas.

River City USA (8.3%). This group consists of middle-class, rural families.

Blue Highways (5.8%). In this group are moderate, blue-collar or farm families.

Other (2.6%). (pp. 14-18)

According to the report, married couples made up 77.3% of the area's households (p. 11). The report predicted that from 1996 to 200 the combined resident age groups of 45-64 years and 65+ years would increase by around 20% (p. 5). It was also predicted that the combined number of households with annual income of $60,000 or over would double by the year 2001 (from around 10.5% to around 20.5%) (p.13).

Two years ago, the school created a profile of its students and their families for its School Improvement Plan (SIP) (Woody Gap School, 1998). It was reported here that the school's student ages ranged from five to 18 years, with "the age mix within grade levels var[ying] little from that of larger schools" (p. 4). The SIP report concurs with the LCEC report on the number of married couples in area households. It reports that "the majority of Woody Gap's students (75%) lives [sic] in a traditional family with both parents" (p. 6). The SIP reported that a majority of students' parents held occupations in homemaking (26%), services (17.1%), skilled craft (14.8%), medicine (12.7%), farming (12.5%), transportation (6.9%) professionals (6%), and executives (4%) (p. 5). The SIP also reports that the average attendance for students, grades K-12, was 93.26% and faculty was 95.09% (p.19).

The 1999-2000 Georgia Public Education Report Card (GPERC, 2001) for Woody Gap School reports that of the 97 students attending Woody Gap School, all of its students were White English speakers and 41 were females, 56 were males, 13 were enrolled in Special Education, and 48 of the 97 received free or reduced-price lunches.

The 1999-2000 drop out rate for grades 6-12 was zero compared to 5.3% (113 students) for the county. No students were retained (p. 1).

When school scores for the Iowa Test of Basic Skills are compared to scores of the system or the state, the school's scores lag behind in third and fifth grades, but mostly excel in the eighth grade (GPERC, 2001, pp. 2-4). When school scores for the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests are compared to scores of the system or the state, few of the school's scores fall in the "exceeds" category: most lay in either the "meets" or "does not meet" ranges of competency or both (p. 5). For the 1999-2000 year, 66.7% (four out of six) of Woody Gap's graduates qualified for the state's HOPE scholarship compared to the system's 42.4% and the state's 57.6% (p. 6). The report listed the school's graduation rate for years 1996-2000 as 85.7% compared to 65% for Union County and 70.7% for the state of Georgia (p. 6). When scores for the school are compared to the scores of the system and state, it is important to keep in mind the impact of the small enrollment numbers. A student's absence on a test day may can cause scores within a grade or subject to fluctuate wildly. The low score of one student may significantly reduce overall average scores. For example, because one student out of six did not pass the writing portion of the Georgia High School Graduation Test, the resulting pass rate for the senior class of Woody Gap School for 1999-2000 was 83% (GPERC, 2001, p. 6). On the other hand, a strong group of students can just as easily inflate the school's status within state school rankings. This same class ranked first in the state of Georgia for the overall scores of six students on the Georgia High School Graduation Test, while averaging a lower Student Achievement Test score than the system or state average (p. 7). The purpose in making these comparisons is not to diminish or exaggerate the accomplishments of the school, its students or staff. It is to alert the reader to the impact the scores of a few students may have on overall averages and to suggest that a grain of salt be taken while considering them.

According to the 1999-2000 Georgia Public Education Report Card, the number of certified personnel employed at Woody Gap School for the 1999-2000 school year included one administrator, three part-time support personnel, four part-time teachers, and 15 full-time teachers. The average years of experience for the administrator were 27, support personnel were 17.67, and teachers were 14.20 (GPERC, 2001, p. 8). The report listed Woody Gap School as being accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Secondary/Middle Commission (p. 8).

Although Woody Gap School is sometimes referred to as "Woody Gap High School" or simply "Woody Gap School," it is recognized by the state as "Woody Gap High/Elementary School" (GPERC, 2001, p. 1). The school is also referred to as a K-12 unit, but does have a pre-kindergarten program. It is housed in the firehouse across the highway from the school. Its enrollment for the 1999-2000 year was two. The rest of the school is organized as schools within a school. The elementary school has a kindergarten class (six students), first grade/second grade class (16 students), and third grade/fourth grade class (17 students). The middle school includes the fifth grade/sixth grade class (17 students) and seventh/eighth grade class (18 students). The high school serves 23 students (School Rolls, 1999-2000; Annual Staff, 2000).

As an accredited school, Woody Gap School adheres to the graduation requirements of Georgia. Its middle and high school curriculums provide courses in language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, health and physical education, foreign language, and vocational studies. These courses are necessary to receive diplomas in Vocational, College Prep, and College Prep with Distinction programs (Woody Gap School, 1998, p. 31). Despite the benefit of the state's sparsity grant, small student numbers means relatively fewer courses, athletic programs, and after school activities than other larger schools. Because of its size, 90% of the school's total budget must go toward covering current employee salaries and benefits (Woody Gap School, 1998, p. 38), and the school can not offer a fine arts program or enough courses required for a Tech Prep diploma. Former principal Becky Smith explains:

> With just six high school teachers and 23 students, we can't offer as much variety in courses as the larger schools.... We have no music, no art, and not very many

> electives. And we certainly can't field a football team. But on the other hand, our in-school suspension is always small, often zero. Our lockers don't even have doors on them. (Raudonis, 1998, p. 23)

Because of low turnover, school size and class arrangements, teachers at Woody Gap School have opportunities to get to know their students very well, often teaching the same children for several years in a row. According to the school counselor, because of the low numbers, students are easily missed: "...It is very rare that a student will skip a class.... The little kids will tattle on the bigger kids if they do something wrong" (Raudonis, 1998, p. 23).

Despite the isolation of the community in which the small number of students live, the school works closely with the community to educate the students of the Suches community. Principal Becky Smith told Lee Raudonis (1998):

> We are very family-oriented. When there is inclement weather, all parents and teachers receive a personal call to let them know that school is canceled, and after parents visit the school for progress reports or some other event, they receive a thank-you note. (p. 22)

School and Community

It's over. The evening's awards, essays, words of encouragement and inspiration, anecdotes, acknowledgements, songs, and tears give way to applause. The new graduates stand and turn to leave the stage. In honor of the new graduates, the school's juniors follow tradition and hold lit candles, standing along the aisle to send their former classmates off into the world and to take their place as the new legion at the top of the class. With much fanfare, the audience cheers and applauds the six young adults who are whisking by, holding their caps to their heads and clutching their diplomas in hand and the five rising seniors flanking them. As the applause subsides, the house lights are brought up. Audience members and distinguished guests stand and stretch in the auditorium made cooler by the night breezes. They turn and shake hands, hug, or call out to acquaintances, former teachers, neighbors, customers, coworkers, and family *members. Some of these individuals are parents who have just completed an official association with the school that began 13 years ago. Many of the ceremony's attendees are Woody Gap graduates with children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren enrolled at Woody Gap School. There are some children racing down the aisle who are attending the school their great great-grandparents attended 60 years ago.*

Slowly, the laughing and chattering crowd makes its way out of the auditorium. Groups drift out the side door and down to the lunchroom where an informal banquet is waiting for them. Teachers serve an array of vegetables, fruit, small sandwiches, and slices from a large sheetcake with an attractive icing inscription, wishing the graduates good luck in the future, listing all six of their first and last names. Now shed of their gowns and caps, the grinning and flushed graduates mingle among well wishers, faculty, students, and family members. Members of the community have come to the graduation ceremony tonight out of respect, pride, and duty. Observer-participants in this rite of passage include retired teachers, the clinic doctor and his nurse-wife, teacher spouses, bus drivers, custodians, neighbors down the road, business owners, political leaders, the local school board member and postal carrier (one and the same), local ministers, a youth director, and the county superintendent.

Soon the graduates slip out, not to go to a party, but to spend the night camping on the property of a graduate's home. Several past graduates point out that this part of graduation night in Suches is typically a night of quiet camaraderie, nostalgia, and reflection, than wild antics (though I think I see an occasional wink as we talk). Just as when a bride and groom slip off from a wedding party that is going well, the graduation celebration continues without its honorees. This is an opportunity that doesn't come often for many living down long, winding unpaved roads. It is a chance to catch up with the news and to see familiar faces. Exhausted, I stop photographing, eating, and chatting. I sit down on a folding chair in the corner of the room and watch the exchange of smiles, the quick hugs, and the nodding heads of sympathetic listeners. Children skitter through *the room and out into the yard. Volunteers begin to gather trash and pack up the leftover food. Finally, I stand up to go, leaving the buzz of fellowship behind me.*

School activities at Woody Gap School often revolve around local culture and customs, and they often involve members of its community (see Figures 11 and 12). Interactions between school and community are often dependent on the school setting. An article written for the Atlanta Journal and Constitution (Cawthorn, 1988) stressed the importance of the school setting as a stage for the school's involvement with the community:

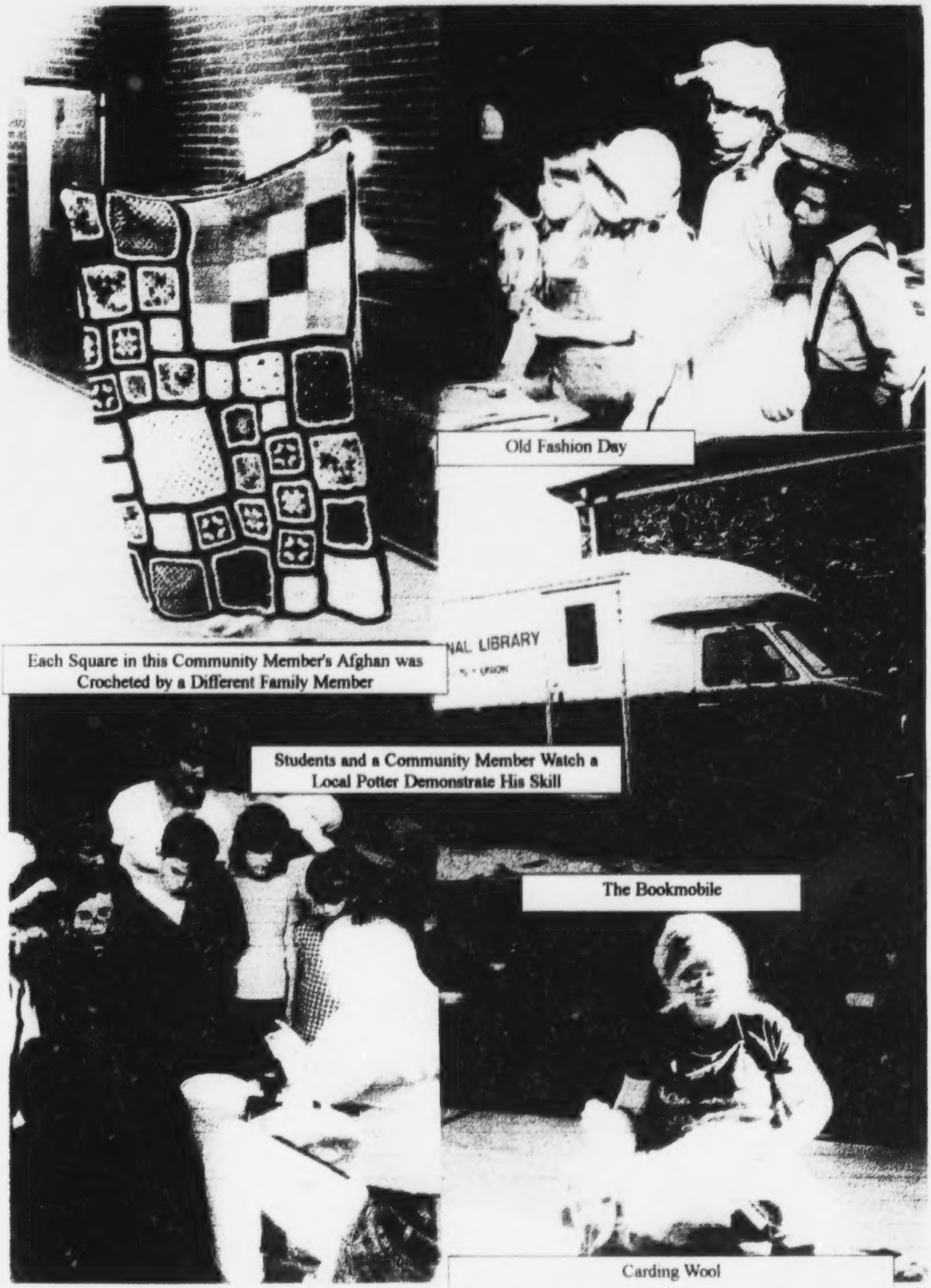
> The school is a regular staging ground for fund-raisers, festivals, and family reunions. . . ."We are the only place in the community everyone is involved with," George Burch, [then] Woody Gap principal says. "The churches have their own things. The volunteer fire department has its own thing. But everyone comes together here. . . .If the school ever did go, it would tear out the core of the community." (p. 9A)

Elsewhere, Burch pointed out that Woody Gap School is a close-knit school because of

> the smallness of the community and the lack of distractions. You have your churches, the community medical center, the community fire department, and the school, and those are the major social functions of the community. Everyone pretty well knows their neighbor and the smallness allows things to be communicated. I see lots of parents daily since I live here and that all builds to making a close community. (Parham, 1992, 1A)

In the school's School Improvement Plan (SIP) (Woody Gap School, 1998), the Vision, Mission, and several Beliefs put forth by the faculty and staff were tied to including and appreciating the community as part of the school's curriculum and service:

> Vision: . . . .Competent, caring personnel will prepare our students to meet their individual needs, the needs of the *community*, and the needs of the state and nation.



Old Fashion Day

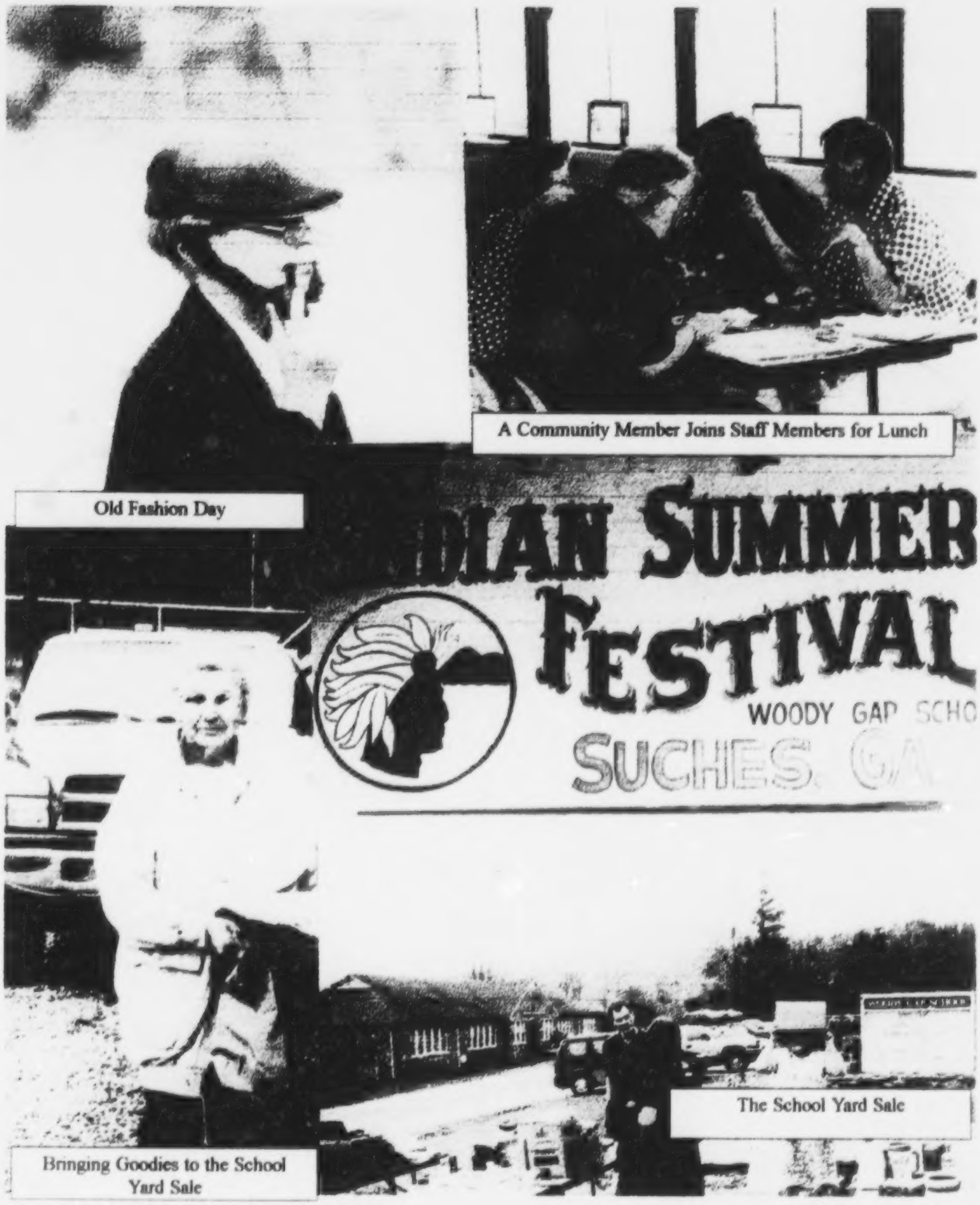
Each Square in this Community Member's Afghan was Crocheted by a Different Family Member

Students and a Community Member Watch a Local Potter Demonstrate His Skill

The Bookmobile

Carding Wool

Figure 11. School and Community Collage, Part 1



A Community Member Joins Staff Members for Lunch

Old Fashion Day

Bringing Goodies to the School Yard Sale

The School Yard Sale

Figure 12. School and Community Collage, Part 2

> Mission: The mission of Woody Gap School is to provide a quality educational environment that will prepare our students to become productive citizens within and beyond our rural *community*.
>
> Beliefs: The faculty and staff of Woody Gap School believe:
>
> The teachers, parents, and the *community* share the responsibility for the support of the school's mission and the learner's education….
>
> In preserving our rural heritage through our curriculum, school, and *community* programs….
>
> That a high quality environment is an asset to our *community* and should be understood, valued, and sustained for the future. [italics added] (p. 57)

Within the same document, the staff and faculty targeted goals for incorporating more community and school resources within the curriculum. They also recognized a lack of cultural and ethnic diversity in the community and the school's learning programs, stating a need to promote understanding and awareness of the diversity found in the broader world.

Students at Woody Gap School have provided service to and interacted with the community through a variety of organized activities. Activities cited include involvement in the 4-H program, Annual Woody Gap Community Clean Up Campaign, distribution of the community-school Newspaper (*Woody Gap Dispatch*), Fishing Day, Grandparents Day, "Granny Wheeler" Day, Highway Adoption Clean-Up, History Walk-Abouts, Local Area Studies Class, local nursing home volunteer work, old cemetery visitation and documentation, Old Fashion Day, Sports Club's Fall Indian Summer Festival, Spring Fling, and square dancing. (Cawthorn, 1998; Gipe, 1997; Tenngalina Conference Summary, 1997; Woody Gap School, 1998). School and community interactions are further promoted when the school allows its facilities to be used for social and civic functions. It has been cited as the rendezvous point for community activities and meetings for the Gaddistown Homemakers, Red Cross blood drives, Suches Historical Society, church revivals, workshops, and community classes (Annual Staff, 2000; Jodice, 1985; *Woody Gap Dispatch*, 2000; Woody Gap School, 1998). The school also lends its lunchroom for special occasions and events such as baby showers, wedding receptions, and family reunions.

There are several organizations within the Suches community and the county that include service to school as part of their mission. Examples of service include work projects to improve the school's physical plant and grounds, financial support, (e.g. scholarships for all graduates enrolled in higher education), extra and co-curricular activities and programs, recognition of student achievement, and promotion of civic involvement and good citizenship. Community organizations cited as having supported the school in these types of service are the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, Allegheny Masonic Lodge #114, Big Rock Clinic, Camp E-Ma-Laku, DARE program, the Department of Natural Resources, Gaddistown Homemakers, Kiwanis Club, Rotary Club, Sons of Confederate Veterans, Sports Club, United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Volunteer Fire Station (Cawthorn, 1998; Cooper, 1999; Gipe, 1997; Tenngalina Conference Summary, 1997; *Woody Gap Dispatch*, 2000; Woody Gap School, 1998). Another, less formal, form of local support of the school is community members "pitching in" to update and enhance the facilities of the school. Past efforts have provided new additions such as "playground equipment, a baseball field and tennis courts, and a new building to house weight-lifting machines for the PE Department, [constructed] by community labor operating with county funds" (Jodice, 1985, 18).

Additional interactions between members of the community and the school come through extra-curricular opportunities: the community regularly supports and attends school sports events. A past principal observed, "There are no other areas where everyone meets as a group, and any time we have a ballgame or event, you'll see virtually the entire community out here to support it" (Jodice, 1985). The community supports four school basketball teams: boys' middle school, girls' middle school, boys' varsity, and girls' varsity; two school tennis teams: boys' and girls' varsity; a coed skeet shooting team, and a girl's softball team (Annual Staff, 2000; *Woody Gap Dispatch*, 2000; Woody Gap School, 1998).

Community members are also encouraged to visit the school setting on a regular basis during its regular operating hours. Retirees, professionals, youth ministers, parents, business owners, health care professionals, and alumni interact with the school and students as project volunteers (book fair, event production, yard sales, car washes, craft demonstrations, gardening), tutors, substitutes, guest speakers, artisans, and bus drivers. Community members also visit the school regularly to attend celebrations such as the Academic Banquet, Athletic Banquet, Baccalaureate Ceremony, Elementary Awards Ceremony, High School Graduation, Homecoming, Middle School Graduation, and Playground Dedication (Annual Staff, 2000; *Woody Gap Dispatch*, 2000; Woody Gap School, 1998). Other interactions may occur when community members make impromptu visits, bring donations, or drop off notices about local events or concerns. Some community members drop by to have lunch in the school lunchroom:

> Although a sign on the front door admonishes all visitors to report directly to the office, it is apparently a mere formality for many parents, who often avail themselves of the home-cooked meals in the lunchroom for a very small fee. It is, after all, as Smith points out, "the only cafeteria in town." (Jodice, 1985, p. 18)

Co-curricular activities can take students off campus and out into the community. School-community programs and projects undertaken by the Annual Staff, Class Officers, Future Farmers of America, Impact Club, Media Class, and Student Council provide students with opportunities to be active participants in their community and to apply or acquire knowledge in real world settings (Annual Staff, 2000; Woody Gap School, 1998). For the past three years, the Rural School and Community Trust (Rural Trust) has contributed funding to the school to create opportunities for student interactions in the community and to further student appreciation of heritage and local culture. The impact of the Rural Trust contribution can be seen in the curriculum of the classroom. Students have gathered oral histories, documented historical sites, and studied local customs and crafts. Since participating in Rural Trust work, Woody Gap students have planted a school garden, built a cabin, plowed a mule, made soap, sewn a quilt, and begun a bluegrass band. Students have also photographed and filmed locals milking a cow, churning butter, and describing the lore behind historical homesites. High school students created a multi-media presentation of these projects and have shared it with several audiences, including a national conference, the local school board, and a regional meeting of the small school consortium (Tenngalina) to which Woody Gap belongs. Younger students in the school have presented research on local historical figures such as the midwife Granny Wheeler and naturalist Arthur Woody.

This work ties in nicely with Old Fashion Day and Indian Summer Festival, two annual events that focus on local customs and heritage, including local American Indian culture. On these days, it is the older citizens of the community who hold reign. They bring their wool, spinning wheels, clay, soap, wood, carving tools, grinding wheels, lace, quilts, and split oak baskets to the school and spend the day sharing the secrets of the trade and the lore of his or her family's craft with students, teachers, and other members of the community. During Old Fashion Day, students, dressed in the pioneer finest, are given opportunities to try their hand at shelling corn, smoking beehives, or tatting thread (lace making). Students have petted calves, taken buggy rides, stood inside teepees, and asked to ponder what it meant for one to live in the community of Suches more than one hundred years ago.

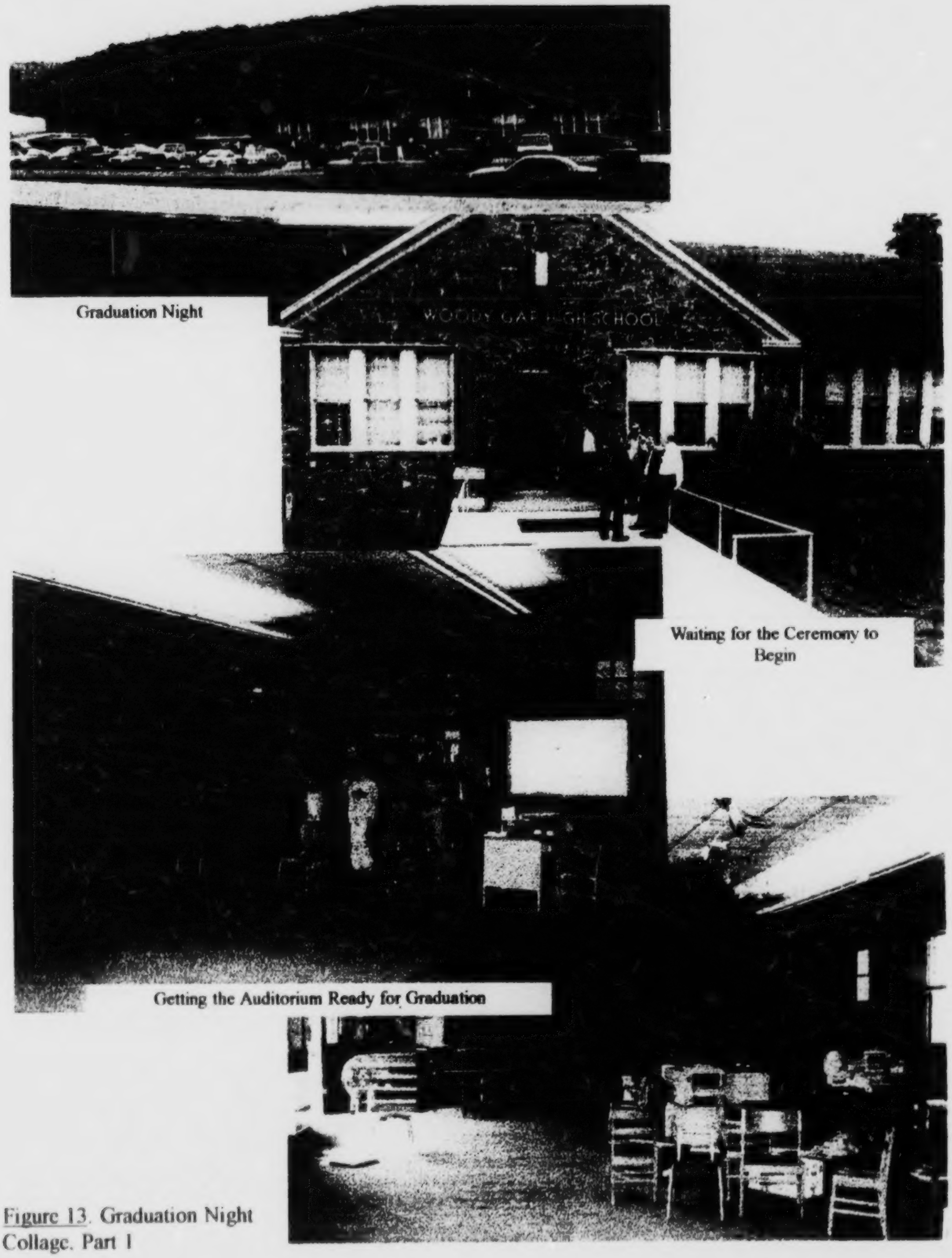
To live in the community of Suches today is to live in a community with one school. Within the walls of that one school is housed grades kindergarten through twelve. The grouping of students of all ages under one roof provides students with opportunities to interact with those other than their peers. Interactions such as these lend themselves to community building within the school and the fostering of a family-like atmosphere. School traditions provide these opportunities of interactions. For example, it is the custom of the school for the school's seniors to orchestrate the annual Easter egg hunt, helping the younger students dye eggs and then hiding them for the rest of the school to find. Annually, the seniors take the younger elementary students fishing, organize the Halloween costume contest, and prepare the school Christmas celebration. Since the school opened, it has been an important tradition for its seniors to search for the perfect Christmas tree to cut down and bring back to decorate in time for the annual Gift-Giving Party:

> The holiday spirit was found Friday afternoon on the auditorium floor of Woody Gap School. There among the metal folding chairs and torn wrapping paper were gift tags, remnants of an age-unknown tradition and the final signature to a day of celebrating.
>
> It was the last day before Christmas break, and the annual custom of students and teachers exchanging presents was over. The kids had gathered their Slinky's and Tinkertoy sets and Jane Fonda workout tapes, model cars, bubble gum machines, and returned to their homerooms. Spreads of cake, chocolate chip cookies, and punch awaited them.
>
> Christmas in the country. It doesn't produce the sparkle and flash of a city Christmas. There are no productions of "The Nutcracker," no glittering department store displays, no Neiman-Marcus or traffic jams at Lenox Square.
>
> But there is the annual Christmas play at Woody Gap School, the carolers who visit the homebound, and the high school seniors who traditionally cut the tree for the school. Traditions here carry as much weight as the lighting of Rich's tree, but with more personal involvement. (Levin, 1984, pp. 1A, 15A)

Another tradition at the school is the annual school yearbook signing. Students of all grades meet in the school gymnasium to sign each other's yearbooks. Older students sign the books of younger students and vice versa. There is a feeling of a family outing as students across grades mingle among each other and sit close to read each other's inscriptions. "We're like their big brothers and sisters....We're close to each other here" (Cawthorn, 1988, 9A).

Woody Gap School is at the center of the Suches community. It provides for and welcomes opportunities for continual interactions between school and community. As a result, community members have a resource to assist them with their social and civic needs. In return, the school benefits from the support provided by the community by way of money, volunteer hours, educational programming, and civic ideology.

Pulling out of the school parking lot, I point my car south towards Dahlonega leaving graduation night behind (see Figures 13, 14, and 15). Thinking about the events of the evening, I wonder that more people do not choose to live in Suches. In this commuter world, 16 miles is not really very far, it can't be the length of the drive. But, as I climb to the next peak and then begin the winding descent through the fog, it comes back to me: it isn't the length of the ride, it is the difficulty of the ride that separates the Suchesians from the flatlanders. Anyone who considers such a move must take into consideration the perils of fog, ice, snow, curves, drop offs, narrowness, and the remoteness of such a ride. For those residents who have lived in the "Valley Above the Clouds" for generations, there is a connectedness to the land and the community that keeps them there. For others, the "outsiders," who are drawn to the beauty of the land and the simplicity of living in Suches, they must consider what it will mean to live without immediate access to taken-for-granted amenities like supermarkets, hospitals, or megabookstores. It requires commitment to live in an isolated community like Suches. Without Woody Gap School, an existence in Suches would be too difficult for many, particularly those with school age children. For others, such arrangement would diminish the quality of life they enjoy. For many in the community, its school provides them with social and civic opportunities to stay connected to other members in the community, educates their children in a small and intimate setting, and has enough needs that, as a community member can always find ways to contribute to its wants.



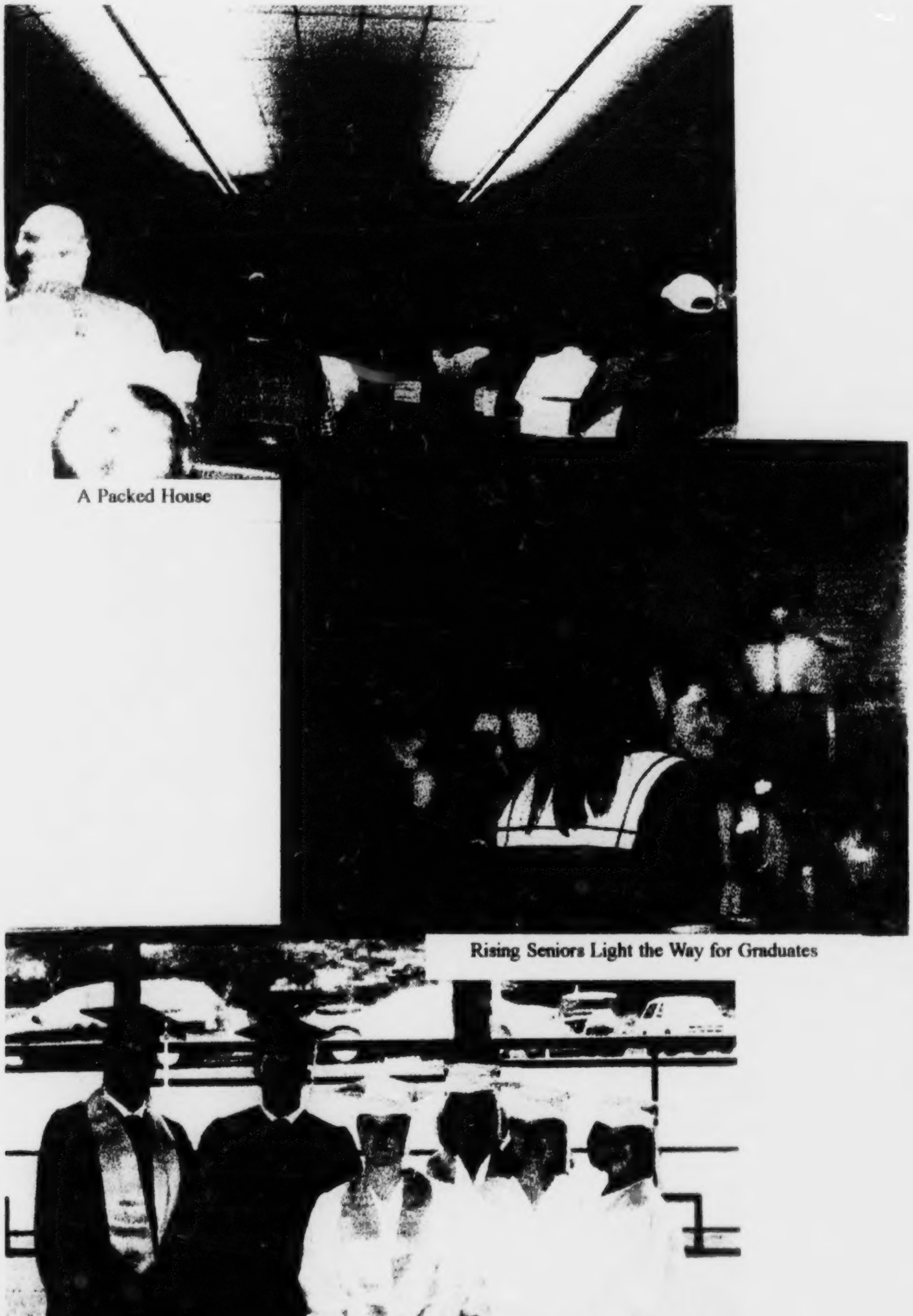
Graduation Night

Waiting for the Ceremony to Begin

Getting the Auditorium Ready for Graduation

Figure 13. Graduation Night Collage. Part 1

Figure 14. Graduation Night Collage, Part 2



A Packed House

Rising Seniors Light the Way for Graduates

The 1999-2000 Woody Gap School Graduating Class

Figure 15. Graduation Night Collage, Part 3

CHAPTER 5

WITHIN-CASE FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between a small rural school in Northeast Georgia and its surrounding community. To do this, I invited three teachers, two community members, and three students, all of whom have an intimate knowledge of the relationship between the community's school and the community, to act as informants in this study. These participants used cameras to collect data that related to their perceptions of the school and community relationship. They created photographs (for photointerviewing), then wrote about their photos (photofeedback), and, finally, they literally held their photos in their hands as they discussed their meanings with me (photoelicitation).

This chapter presents a within-case analysis of each participant's private photoessay. Each private photoessay consists of all of the participant's photographs, photofeedback, and photointerview transcriptions. Themes emerging from these private photoessays were used to create public photoessays. Within the public photoessays, themes were organized around three research questions.

The first research question, "How do educators, students, and community members conceptualize the relationship between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" is concerned with a participant's perceptions and sense-making of the nature and structure of the school and community relationship. The next question, "What kinds of interactions do educators, students, and community members have between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" generated more straight-forward responses; here, specific activities, traditions, and contacts between members of the school and the community are presented as recalled and considered by participants. Finally, the question "How do educators, students, and community members envision the future for the relationship between this school and its community?" asked participants. Finally, the question "How do educators, students, and community members envision the future for the relationship between this school and its community?" asked each participant to forecast how he or she imagines the school and community relationship will or should manifest in the future. Responses organized around this theme were participant's visions for an improved school and community relationship and interactions and suggestions for accomplishing those visions.

Because the above questions deal with participants' perceptions and experiences, it was sometimes difficult to assign some of their responses to strictly one category or question. For example, some participants' responses dealt with cause and effect, and, so, it was often difficult to tell where discussions of relationship ended and listings of interactions began: participants might discuss some interactions as having affected the school-community relationship or some aspects of the school-community relationship having impacted interactions. To avoid redundancy, I chose to present data once within the category I felt was a best fit.

For purposes of clarity, organization, and presentation, data in this chapter are displayed within each public photoessay in the following sequence: first, the participant's photograph; second, the participant's photofeedback, indented, italicized, and arranged as a caption under its accompanying photograph; and third, transcribed text from the photointerview that relates to the photograph, indented. Because I am relating participant stories, I have not necessarily addressed themes in a sequential order according to each research question. However, for each theme I have identified the corresponding research question. Freed from the constrictions of sequence, themes flow more naturally and connections participants make between themes become more evident.

The next chapter, Chapter 6, presents a cross-case analysis of participant data organized into themes: themes common to more than one of the participants and themes specific to individual participants. For that chapter, I again used the three questions guiding my research as the organizers for themes.

Eight Photoessays

Denzin (1994) suggests that social researchers today are facing a crisis of interpretation, proposing that there is a "new sensibility regarding the social text and its claim to authority" (p. 501). Like others (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Geertz, 1973; Richardson, 1991; Wolcott, 1990), he observes that the "age of putative value-free social science appears to be over" (p. 501). In light of this perspective, he reasons that when moving from the field to the text, "fieldworkers can neither make sense of nor understand what has been learned until they sit down and write the interpretive text" (p. 502). The task of writing the interpretive text cannot use criteria from the positivist tradition, because, as Denzin sees it, "Interpretation is an art; it is not formulaic or mechanical. It can be learned, like any form of storytelling, only through doing. Indeed...writing is interpretation or storytelling." (p. 502). The first part of this chapter is the collection of eight stories in the form of public photoessays. I call them stories because as a novice researcher who is attempting to learn the art of interpretation through doing, I am presenting themes that I have constructed and interpreted from data collected by participants and by me. I call them public photoessays because I have constructed these stories from each participant's private photoessay. Each private photoessay contains all of the documented experiences, thinking, attitudes, and beliefs that emerged through the production and discussion of photographs created by the participant to represent his or her interpretations of a relationship between a school and a community. I present these stories in no particular order: first are the stories of the two community members' stories, then the stories of the three teachers, and finally, the stories of the three students. To provide an advance organizer, I have included charts with themes and responses arranged and grouped with each of the three questions (see Tables 2, 3, and 4).

Charlie

Charlie has lived in Suches all of her life. She is the mother of a one-year-old child and married to a schoolteacher. A registered nurse, Charlie works part-time at the clinic across the road from the Woody Gap School. She takes a strong interest in school

Table 2.

Themes for Question 1: How do Educators, Students, and Community Members Conceptualize the Relationship Between this Small Rural School in Northeast Georgia and Its Surrounding Community?

CHARLIE	**JIM**	**MARY**	**HANK**	**RYAN**	**MATT**	**HENRY**
Kinship Connections	Kinship Connections		Kinship Connections	Holding on to Heritage		
Kinship-Like Connections			Kinship-Like Connections	Kinship-Like Connections	Kinship-Like Connections	Kinship-Like Connections
Outsiders and Rules for Conduct	Outsiders and Rules for Conduct	Outsiders and Rules for Conduct	Outsiders and Rules for Conduct	Outsiders and Rules for Conduct	Outsiders and Rules for Conduct	
			Exclusivity	Exclusivity		
			Involvement in Community	Involvement in Community		Student Involvement in Community
			The Chair Brigade	Self-Sufficiency and Tenacity		Personal Connection to Community
			Good People	Old Habits		
			Expectations of Community			

Table 3.

Themes for Question 2: What Kinds of Interactions do Educators, Students, and Community Members have Between this Small Rural School and Its Surrounding Community?

CHARLIE	JIM	MARY	HANK	JOY	HENRY
Community Support of School			Community Support of School	Community Support of School	Community Support of School
Traditions		Past Activities		Activities and Traditions	
	Mutual Reliance	Mutual Reliance			
Giving Back	Centers for School and Community Interaction	School as a Tool for Preserving Heritage			

Table 4.

Responses for Question 3: How do Educators, Students, and Community Members Envision the Future for the Relationship Between this School and Its Community?

CHARLIE	JIM	MARY	HANK	RYAN	JOY	HENRY
Vision for the Future	Vision for the Future	Vision for the Future	Vision for the Future	Vision for the Future	Future Involvement with the School	Vision for the Future

and community activities, volunteering and attending events when her busy schedule allows. Through her photography, her photofeedback, and our photointerviews, Charlie discussed her conception of the school and community relationship through themes of family and friends.

Question 1: Conceptualizing the Relationship Between School and Community

Theme: Kinship Connections. Charlie described the strong connections she feels to her family, the local school, and its community. As a form of introduction, she represents her familial bonds to the school and its community with a photograph of a tree. She explains why she chose this symbol and what it means to her:

The Tree. This picture symbolizes my personal family ties to the school and the community. I attended school at Woody Gap for grades kindergarten through grade twelve. My mother and father both attended Woody Gap for most of their school years. I have two grandparents who also attended school here. My grandmother was valedictorian of the senior class of 1947, and I held that same honor for my senior class 44 years later. I not only had two of the same teachers that my parents had, I was also taught by several people who grew up with my parents and grandparents in this community.

> Number one is a picture of a tree. And this symbolizes…I pulled in not only what I felt like was the school and community's involvement, but also some family involvements in the community and the school. And, some of this stuff is related to what it has done for me and how it has molded me to be the person I am today. But this tree symbolizes my personal family ties to the school. I attended this school, both my parents did. I went here kindergarten through the twelfth grade. I had two grandparents that went here. And I put on the little note here [captions]

> that my grandmother was the valedictorian of the senior class of 1947; and then, my valedictorian speech of 1991, I was able to incorporate that, that many years later. And, I had two of same teachers that my parents had. And I had several teachers that they were either raised with my parents or were raised with my grandparents. So, it was amazing.

School and community ties even afforded Charlie the opportunity to meet her husband. She explains,

Wedding. This picture demonstrates one of the most important aspects of my personal life, and its tie to the school. In 1996, I was observing the teacher of the health occupations class to complete a clinical college credit. I met the new English/Spanish high school teacher, and began playing softball on the varsity girls/community team that he was coaching. We got married in 1998, and now have started a family of our own.

> I guess you can tell…this picture demonstrates one of the most important aspects of my personal life, and it ties to the school. I put on here how I…in 1996…I was observing the health occupations class that I had had in high school on the teaching aspects—for one of my clinical credits as a nurse—I was finishing up my bachelor's, and I met the new English-Spanish teacher. And then, I started playing softball on his community…he had a team for the girls, the high school girls. And what happened was he didn't have enough to play. So he asked some of

> the community members to play. Well, what happened was the kids asked me to play, and I started to playing, and of course things....We got married, and of course, now we have our own family.

Charlie's husband and her mother both work as teachers in the school. Her parents and grandparents attended Woody Gap, as did her sisters. One sister currently substitutes for Woody Gap. Because Woody Gap is the only school in the community, multiple generations of Charlie's family have walked its halls. Throughout her discussion of the school and community relationship, Charlie returned to this lens of "family." She used it again as she described social activities and structures in the community and school that involved her with her peers and classmates.

Theme: Kinship-Like Connections. Along with her close family ties that weave through the community and school, Charlie has also developed lifelong associations with non-kin community members, friendships first formed in school.

Picture. "Old Friends Are Like Heirlooms, Always to be Treasured." This picture symbolizes how many of my closest , life-long friends are people I have known for most of my life. At Woody Gap, everyone knew everyone, and most of us grew up very close. This picture was actually given to me recently by a friend I have known since elementary school.

> This picture says, "Old friends are like heirlooms, always to be treasured." And this symbolizes how many of my closest life-long friends are people I went to school with....You know their parents, their grandparents. And you sort of build this tight-knit--I did, now, I don't know how the kids are now, but I know that when I was in school we were all so close. We were all at somebody's house,

> usually, my parents'--for some reason--house, just about every night of the week until it was bedtime. You know, at 8 o'clock everybody had to be gone so that we could get ready for bed. But we spent a lot of time, you know, together, in school and out of school. I'm still very close to many of them, through e-mail, through the phone; I still see a lot of them.

The close friendships between Charlie and her friends afforded an intimate and family-like environment in school and the community. Tonnies identifies community of the "mind" such as friendship as representing "the truly human and supreme form of community" (in Sergiovani, 1994, p. 6). These associations formed in the school were so kinship-like for Charlie and her peers that, much like siblings, members tended to monitor each other's activities in the school and the community with a protective air. This feeling of schoolmates being "like a brother or a cousin" may spring from being in a small school setting year after year and could account for why members of Charlie's class rarely dated each other:

> And when you go to a school like this, you know everything about everybody, which is not always good....You know just about everything that you would want to know or don't want to know. I can remember dating in high school. You didn't really...I didn't date the boys here very much. But I dated outside in different communities. But the boys here would always be very, almost protective. They would want to know who it is...where...would have to meet them almost like a brother or a cousin would, so that was very interesting....One of the reasons [we rarely dated each other] is because you do become so close, and it was different. You didn't want to date somebody...and if you did date, it was usually somebody that moved in and not gone to school with your whole life.

Theme: Outsiders and Rules for Conduct. Charlie found a framework of intimacy in a small school setting and living in an isolated community. She also found an acceptance within her peer group that did not always extend to those students who came from the "outside."

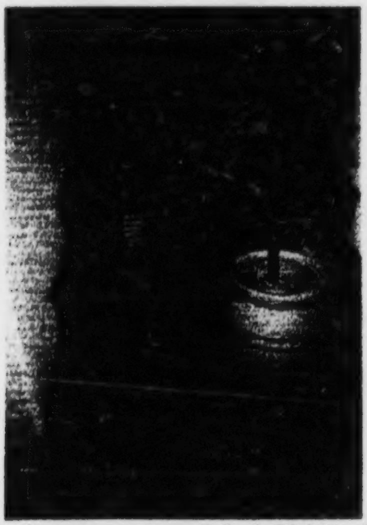
> Alice: Well, tell me about somebody moving in. Were there very many new students when you were here?
>
> Charlie: Yep, actually there were. Quite a few. And I'll tell you, every once in awhile, usually they would come in and everything would be fine, but every once in awhile, you'd have a problem. And I always noticed it was the same thing. If they come in here and, for some reason, people wanted to come in and change things. "Well we didn't do it that way. Why do you do it that way here? You know, well, that's just so backward. I can't believe that you do it that way here." And if they come in here with that attitude, they didn't get along very well with us. I mean, it was just like, we didn't…we didn't…they just didn't fit in as well. If they came in and said, "Hey that's neat; let's try it your way." If they tried to mold in with…tried to get along with the group…when I think back, in high school, it's funny, because I don't think back to having different…like the rednecks, the preps, and the athletes. We didn't have that. We were all one group. There was one or two that didn't spend time with us, usually the ones that were very quiet or withdrawn. But, for the most part, we all formed as a group together. And, I think that's sort of neat, because we did have those that were more, you know, country, and those that had a little more experience outside of here. But as we all came together in different groups, we sort of added…it sort of added to the pot. And it was really neat.
>
> Alice: So, you were able to accept each other's differences?
>
> Charlie: Oh, yeah, we were. Unless, it was like I said, they came in with this attitude like we were just…you know…I think it was just the fact of being a little harder to get along with. I saw it many of times to where they were not as accepted.

It may be that Charlie and her peers had a working knowledge of the rules for being in the group to which "outsiders" were either not privy or were resistant. This created a "we-they" tension that was not resolved until new students either learned the rules or left.

Having lived in Suches all of her life, Charlie has close ties with her small community and the local school. As a lifelong student and community member, she is able to list many interactions between school and community, including past and ongoing traditional events, community efforts to support the school, and her own contributions to the school and community that allow her to interact within both settings.

Question 2: School and Community Interactions

Theme: Traditions. One way to learn some of the rules for being a member of the community is through the observation of its members as they model and reinforce values that the community has decided are important. One place modeling and reinforcement can occur is at the school as school and community members participate in traditional annual observances and activities. Charlie provided examples of these:

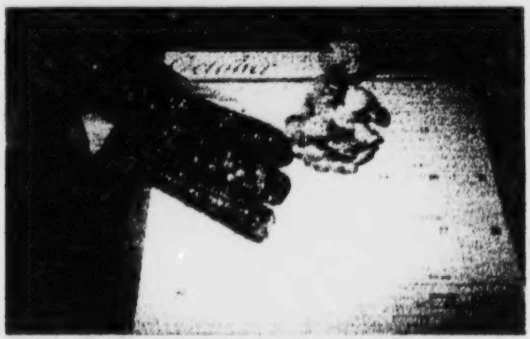


Churn. This symbolizes how important I feel Old-Fashioned Day is to the students of WG and the community. We really enjoyed this day when I was in school, now I continue to enjoy going and observing the activities. Community members are able to teach and demonstrate skills that many of our ancestors viewed as a way of everyday life. I was also asked last year to demonstrate a booth with information of early Suches midwives.

The churn represents...Old-Fashion Day. Umm, it was just the feeling on that day. You experienced it, I'm sure. With all of the elder people, or I say the elder--some of them were not. But the older people of the community come in, showing

> and demonstrating these things that kids today have no idea. I mean, I learn something every time I go….So, that to me is the way of meshing the community with the school, a huge way of meshing the community with the school. I think that is great. That's why I put that in there. And then, I put in here, too, that I was able to come back last year and demonstrate a booth, as an adult.

Old-Fashion Day was first observed while Charlie was still in school. Traditional celebrations at the school are often produced through the efforts of school and community participants. These annual observances are routine times for school and community to strengthen and sustain its relationship. Charlie illustrated and described activities she feels pulls the school and community together, although not all of these events are continued in the school today; something she laments and discusses later as part of her vision for the school's future. She made a photograph for talking about what she considers significant activities, especially Indian Summer Festival.



Calendar. One of the biggest events of the year for the school and the community members occurs in October. I feel the Indian Summer Festival pulls the community and the school together more than any other activity. Most people, children and adults alike, become very excited about the festivities involved with the first weekend in October. Many people put in long hours to help this become a success. All proceeds go to the school.

> The reason I took a picture of a calendar with the month of October and the Indian corn is because this symbolizes the Indian Summer Festival. And, that is the first weekend in October. That is such a huge event; the school's and community's link. Everyone gets excited. You can talk to several of the kids in …I can remember seeing the excitement on their faces. Some of the kids here this year

feel what I used to feel when I was in school. The adults, you know, really enjoy it. And all of the proceeds go to the school.

Halloween/Christmas. During school events at these holidays, many community members are allowed to observe or participate. Every year at Halloween 3-4 community members are asked to judge the costume contests (I even judged one year since I graduated.) At Christmas, when I was in high school, we had people come in and teach us various Christmas carols to present to the rest of the school. Parents also come in and contribute to holiday parties.

And this picture (laughs) is Halloween and Christmas with a link to the holiday seasons, with the different holidays with the school and community and how the community can be involved with the holidays. We still have costume contests here on Halloween. That is so much fun.... We used to have a Halloween carnival here. They haven't done that here in awhile. But that was one of things we did do. And community members, anyone actually, can come to observe and watch or participate, and, you know, help out. The parents come and have parties with their kids. Halloween is one of the days that we did that. And of course, Christmas. They still have Gift Exchange. I did not put that on here. I should have, but they have it. They draw names, each grade. Each student draws names. And teachers, they used to, I don't know if they still do names, too, you know, among the teachers. These seniors go out with either their sponsor, when I was in school it was the principal who took them out, and they get the big Christmas tree and decorate that, have a singing night to decorate that. Then they do the packages. All of the packages go under the tree the day of Christmas. Of course, you know, when they get out of school. And so, the seniors disburse them out, and they have

> a big get together in the auditorium. I mean, it really, it just pulls everything in, and that's another thing that if the community wanted to come. When I was in high school, we had people come in from the outside and teach us Christmas carols to sing, and the high school would present it to the entire school.

Theme: Community Support of School. Charlie points out through her captions, photographs, and the photointerviews that the school welcomes community members in to observe and participate in school activities. In addition to her listing of examples of school and community involvement through Old-Fashion Day, Indian Summer Festival, and holiday celebrations, other interactions between the school and community involve the community's support of the school. Charlie explains how sometimes the school counts on the community to help this small school's traditions continue. For example, after describing a typical Homecoming at the school, she recalls how the girls' traditional basketball game was almost cancelled, until the community stepped in to help.

Crown. This symbolizes how important I feel basketball homecoming is to the school and community. Almost every family in Suches is represented at this game. Kindergarten through eighth grade favorites are presented as court attendants and high school has representatives from each class. This year the varsity girls game was cancelled by the other team, I called around the community and a few of the women alumni played a scrimmage game with them before the boys game.

> This one is a picture of a crown, which symbolizes how important that I feel Homecoming is. I put on here almost every family in Suches is represented at this game. Because you have kindergarten through eighth grade represent their favorite…they call them, I think, attendants, where they come up and get to come

out and dress up their little favorites. They're announced and the name of their parents and everything. And then, they go over and sit down on the bench. And then, when it's time for the crown, and the flowers, and the second-runner-up, they come and bring everything. It's really neat how it incorporates the whole school. And then, the high school has a representative from each grade. It's really neat. And, I put in here, how this year the varsity girls' game was cancelled by the other team. They just called up and said, "We just can't do it." And so, Mr. -- asked me on the Tuesday before the next Friday, it was almost two weeks, he says, "Is there any way you think that you can get a team together to play with our girls?" I think that there ended up being ten or twelve of us alumni, women from the ages of... let's see the youngest was probably my sister who is twenty-one all the way up to probably forty-five, maybe closer to fifty. So, anyway, we all got together and played. What's funny is one of the little senior girl's mom and her aunt was on the team. And you know, it was fun! And we played... what my sister said was... my sister was so funny... she said, "How many people..." because she played basketball, too... "how many people get the opportunity to go back to high school at Homecoming and play basketball?" (laughs) And I said "Not many!"

Alice: Well, who won?

Charlie: Well, we don't need to talk about it... (laughs)

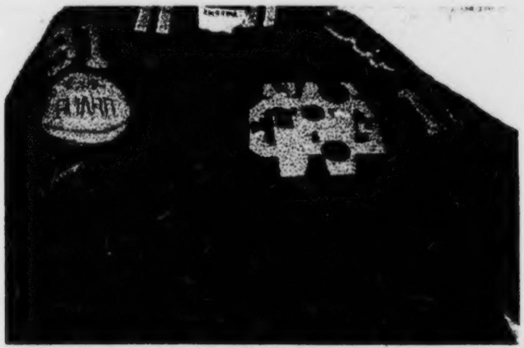
Alice: (laughs)

Charlie: Who won or who got killed? They won.

Alice: Well, it was their Homecoming.

Charlie: Yes, it was their Homecoming, and they were in much better shape than we were. I told Mr.--, "Next year, can you give us at least, you know, a month?" I think we had two practices. But, it was fun. So, anyway, that was a community and school involvement.

Unlike most schools, Woody Gap does not have enough students to have a football team--typically, there are around 20 or so students in the entire high school--so the school and community focus on basketball as the school's main sport. Homecoming is held during basketball season; the Sports Club fundraises for the basketball teams; and many community members come out to games to support the school's players. Charlie sees this support as an important link between school and community.

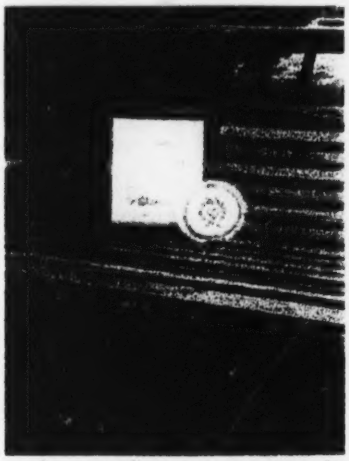


Jacket. This symbolizes how basketball has an important link between community and school. Many community members support the teams. This is the biggest sport WG currently offers. I played basketball from my fifth trough twelfth grade. I loved the game then, and still enjoy it now. I also now enjoy going to watch or help with the statistic books for my husband who currently coaches at WG.

> Okay, the jacket symbolizes how important basketball is as a link between the community and the school. It's the biggest sport we have here. And, it's…it's….I loved the game then, and I love it now. A lot of community supports it with the kids, and it just sort of brings everybody together. I put in here how now I come back. Of course, my husband coaches now. And, I come back now and help with the statistics book and hardly miss a game. I missed a few this year because of having a baby (laughs), other than that I'm at just about every one of them!

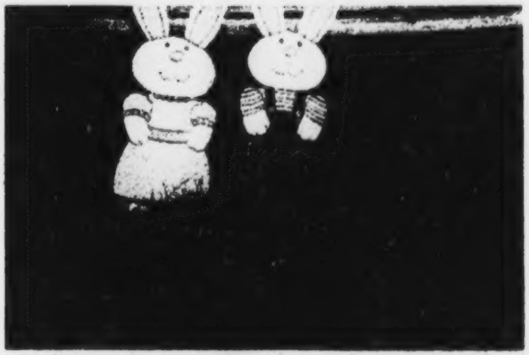
The community provides students for the school while providing the additional resources the school needs to sustain its traditional activities and functions larger schools may take for granted. Through attendance and service, Charlie is able to stay connected to activities she enjoyed in school. These opportunities provide a stage for Charlie where she can reinforce some of the rituals and traditions she feels should be continued and valued in the community.

Theme: Giving Back. Besides her lifelong love of basketball, Charlie has identified other skills and talents she gained from community members and teachers as a student and continues to nurture and use today as a community member. As a community member, Charlie brings these skills and talents to functions sponsored by the school; she is contributing to the interactions between school and community.



Needle Point. This is an example of one of my hobbies that I was first introduced to at WG. In middle school, I was provided with the opportunity to take a needle point class. The one on the right was the first one I ever completed.

> It's an example of the hobbies I was introduced to here. I'm not sure if they do this at other schools, but when I was in, probably sixth or seventh grade, we had a class of candlewicking. That's what it's called. One of the teachers who's still here is the one who taught me, Ms.--. She taught us the candlewicking, and it's where you come up and twist the thing around and you make the little balls. And this little round piece is my first piece that I ever did. If you look real close, you can tell how old it is. The other one is a piece that I've done since then. That's just one of the hobbies I enjoy that I was introduced to here.



Woodworking. I also took a woodworking class as an elective during my senior year. The bunnies were one of my original projects. Now I make various items to sell at fall festivals, including the Indian Summer Festival.

This is another one. This is the woodworking. When I was in high school, I had a construction class…it was me and another girl…it was a class of girls when I graduated. It was me and another girl; we had a woodworking class. We thought that was the most ridiculous thing. We fought it for a week: "We're not taking this class. It wasn't that I thought it was something that I just, you know, thought a female shouldn't do. It was just that I did not want to do that. I mean, I would rather be doing something else; I loved the annual stuff; I loved basketball or anything I could do like that. I just didn't want to take woodworking, well, construction was what they called it. But when I got in there and we started doing this, I loved it.

Alice: And now, you are doing some of this!

Charlie: And now, I do that to sell at festivals, including the Indian Summer Festival. And here is one of my projects that we make and sell, one of the puppets.

Alice: So that's something you carried into your adult life

Charlie: Um hmm, of course, like I said, I come back to the Festival I was raised with to sell them.

This also symbolizes an activity I really enjoy. When I was in ninth grade we were given a fishing class as one of our PE credits. There were five girls in that class and is was taught by the only school coach at that time. We learned everything from the basics of tying a knot to the more difficult aspects of bait and casting. We used the creek behind the school, which is seen in this picture. We had a great time, and, yes, we had to clean our own fish.

Here is number eight, the creek. Now this one symbolizes an activity that I also really enjoy. I don't know if they do this anywhere else, in other schools, but when I was in ninth grade, we were given a fishing class, and that was one of our P. E. credits. The coach that was here did it. And we went down to the creek right back here and we had to fish for an hour every day. But it was so involved, because we had to learn, I put in here, learn from the simplest of tying knots to the hardest parts of the baiting, the types of baits to use, the names of the baits and the knots, the different types of casting, the poles; I mean the whole thing. And then, in the gym, the circles where you shoot foul shots? We had to stand on one foul line and cast into that circle. It was part of one of our exams. I mean, it was very, you know, in depth. Of course, for our final exam, for which we had a two hour, two and a half hour slot, we got to fish up and down this creek, for two and a half hours. I put in here: "and yes, we had to clean our own fish." What's so funny is

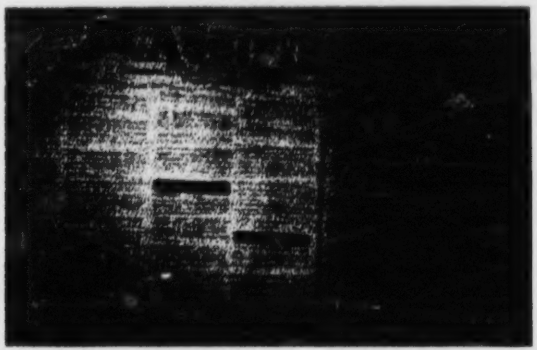
> that it was five girls: my class, all girls!...It was great!...But I took a picture. This is the creek back here behind the school. And I love to fish. My husband and I, we love to fish.

Nursing. I had a health occupation class my senior year. Up until that time, I had not decided what career to pursue when I finished school. Some of the information I was exposed to in that class increased my interest in the health care field. I went to North Georgia College and State University and obtained a BS in Nursing.

> This is, of course, nursing. I put in here that I had health occupations in high school. And until that senior year of high school, I was a little unsure of what I wanted to do. I didn't know. I had a lot of questions, maybe this, maybe that. That class, I just loved. I loved the whole aspect of it. I went straight in knowing what I wanted and finished seven years later. (Laughs) I still look back and think...you know, even though it's a very tough job...I look back, and I am very glad that that's what I decided to do.

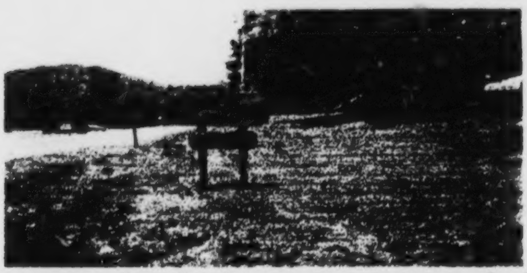
The skills and motivation Charlie credits as having come from her experiences as a student in Woody Gap School are today practiced and demonstrated by her as a member in the community. Many of these skills like fishing, needlework, and sports, afford her recreational enjoyment that can be shared with members of such an isolated community. Through her school, she found ways to entertain herself and her family in ways that are acceptable to the community. In addition, she continues to bring these skills back to the school to contribute to school and community functions and to encourage the involvement of the school's students and the community's members.

No longer a member of the school-going generation, Charlie is now a community elder who feels that it is her role to present her knowledge and experiences to students at the school, as others once did with her. She shares with students what it is like to be a trained professional, all the while continuing to in work her native community.



Classifieds. We had the opportunity to participate in career day when I was in high school. At that time, we went to Blairsville to observe the booths with Union County School. Many organizations were represented and we were able to ask questions and to obtain information about many different careers. Last year I was asked, as a community member, to demonstrate and discuss aspects of my career. I had a great time with the students.

The classifieds (picture) represents Career Day. When I was in high school, we went to Blairsville, and I think they called it "Probe" or something. They had people coming in from different colleges and different careers. And you could talk to them about what you wanted to do when you got out of school. Well, now they do it here, and last year, they asked me to come back, and I set up a demonstration. And I did a demonstration with the kids on nursing. So, it was great. They loved it. They got to get dressed in the scrubs and the whole thing, pretend they were operating on somebody. It was fun; we had fun.



Sign. I am now working back in my community as the RN at the Medical Center located across the road from the school. I have worked in a hospital and with a home health agency outside of this community. I now enjoy working back close to home.

> This one, the sign, represents how I am back in my community now, as a nurse, working in the medical center across from the school. I've worked in several different areas and in home health and community nursing, and... hospitals, and that type of thing. But now I'm back here, and I'm really enjoying being closer to home.

Charlie has continued with several hobbies that require skills she learned as a student at Woody Gap School. As a community member, she now shares these skills with others in her locale. One interest she gained in school led her to pursue a career in health care. Now a professional, she shares her nursing skills at the community's clinic to help members maintain their health. In addition, she regularly returns to the school where she first considered nursing as a possible career choice and encourages students to do the same.

Charlie's Vision for the Future of the Relationship Between School and Community

Although it has been almost a decade since Charlie graduated from public school, and her child is not yet of school-going age, she maintains strong ties to the school through activities shared between school and community. She is emotionally connected to and concerned with school-community traditions and activities, continuing to participate in them as a community elder. Charlie described a *mental photograph*,[1] a photograph she did not actually produce but imagined as she thought about the relationship between Woody Gap School and Suches.

---

[1] For the purpose of this study, and as discussed in the Methodology Chapter, the term *mental photograph* refers to photofeedback or photointerview responses that describe photographs the participants had wished to create or consider creating, but didn't. The empty box represents the mental photograph, and its "production" weights as heavily as other photographs in the photoessay.

> *I really enjoyed participating in this project. I only wish I had taken a picture of the mountain roads. Of course, there are some drawbacks to going to school here. As most people know, we are very isolated. To leave this beautiful community, you must travel across one of three mountains.*

Charlie worries that young people living in the community do not have enough to do to keep them challenged and satisfied, and so, in the future, they may choose to leave. She is a local public school graduate, volunteer, mother, and wife, with kinship and friendship ties to the community. As a practicing professional, her situation in an isolated rural community is unusual in that she has been able to stay and work in her community as a professional. By contributing to and strengthening the school-community relationship, a relationship she perceives as important, Charlie can model for younger members of the community possible ways to live and work in a rural place. Her contribution may help counter the rural dilemma of "braindrain," where the best and the brightest leave the community to work elsewhere. Charlie hopes that when younger members see professional community members continue to participate in their communities as skilled mentors and volunteers, they will see their places of birth as a valid and desired place to return and to contribute, as she has chosen to do.

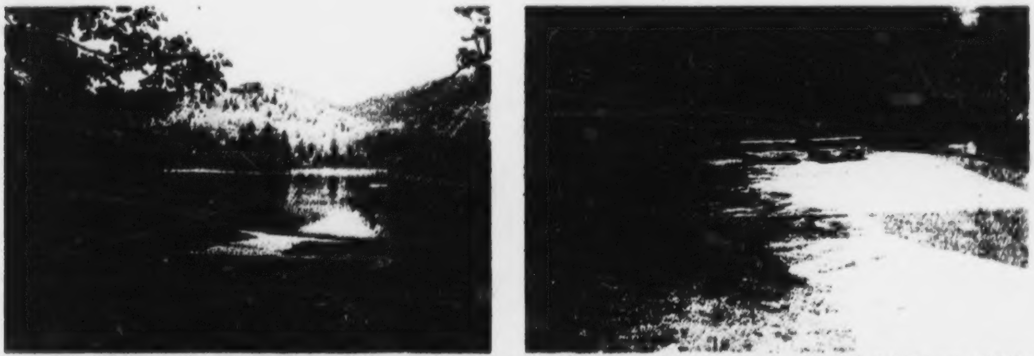
Jim

A year-round resident in the Suches area for 17 years, Jim is a semi-retired, medical worker in a facility in nearby Gainesville. This year his wife will retire from teaching after a 30-year career. She taught for several years at Woody Gap. Every summer, Jim travels with his wife to Europe for a vacation. Both he and his wife lived in urban settings before they moved to Suches. A very active community member, Jim currently serves as the president of the Woody Gap Sports Club. This is an organization that works closely with Woody Gap School to provide additional resources for its activities and students. Jim also devotes a great deal of his spare time as a volunteer at the local fire department.

Several themes pertaining to the school and community relationship emerged from Jim's photographs, photofeedback, and his responses to the photointerviews. Jim talked about his family's involvement with school and community, how he perceives the tensions between "insiders" and "outsiders," and the impact those tensions have on the school and community relationship.

Question 1: Conceptualizing the Relationship Between School and Community

Theme: Kinship Connections. Jim's move to Suches was gradual. He first became acquainted with the area while camping with his family and doing volunteer work with the forest service. Eventually, he, his wife, and son moved to a home in the community and set-up year-round residence.



This is the site of the former campground host cabin at Lake Winfield Scott (USFS Recreation Area) which was burned in an arson fire several years after our tenure there. We came to Suches as forest service volunteers on Memorial Day in 1981 and continued with this activity until the end of June in 1987. During the first of this time, we commuted from Atlanta where we lived, but in late 1983 we moved to Suches full time.

Well, [photographs] number one and number three were both taken at Lake Winfield-Scott. The first one is the site of the former host cabin, which is what got us started in our experiences in Suches. We were campground hosts there for about seven seasons. And what we did was just see to the campers' needs. The other picture is of overlooking the lake, very near to where the host cabin used to be. And we could sit there in the morning; go down and sit on big old piece of log and watch the sun come up over that little lake down there. You can just barely see the swimming area in the lake down there, which is where all the kids in the community hung out. Which is what I think I said [later] is sort of what got us in our dealings with the community.... Our son was 14 years old at the time, and he was just all over Suches. I mean, after that first summer, he knew everybody from Gaddistown to the Lumpkin County line. Ah, and was just running wild with all the rest of the kids around here, which helped our entrance into the community. Anyway, after a couple seasons driving up here during the spring and the fall, and then staying here all summer--[my wife] stayed here all summer, and I was here with as much vacation time as I could get—we just got kind of tired of going down the mountain when they turned the water off in the system, because it's not a winterized system. [My wife] left her job teaching in Dekalb County, got a job teaching the same program in Lumpkin County. I mean, it was one of those...the handoff on that thing was just really weird. Then I commuted back and forth to work.

Into the house where we are still. Involvement in the community began quickly because the lake and the rest of the recreation area was (and is) heavily used by the community kids and we came to know most of them. Our son, then 14, joined them pretty seamlessly. [My wife] visited the school to ask if our son could use the outdoor basketball goal and was told by the then principal that, not only would it be ok, but when school closed for the summer, the gym was left open and a couple of basketballs were left out for the kids and young adults. There were also pick-up basketball games during evenings on the field behind the school. When we moved here, while [my wife] taught, first in Lumpkin County and then at Woody Gap, I commuted to Atlanta and during the spring when would-be north-bound through hikers were starting their trek shuttled them from Atlanta to the trail in exchange for donations to either the fire department or the school. Over the years this ran to thousands of dollars. If one of them was especially interesting or from some interesting place, we would intercept them at Woody Gap, a well known trail/road crossing for which the school was named, and they would be pressed into service as a resource at the school in exchange for a free lunch and maybe a shower.

There's a bunch of pictures here of the trail in Woody Gap, from whence the name of the school. That, the trail was part of the attraction to North Georgia that got us up here to begin with. We hadn't really hiked on it much, but we were

> aware of it. When we first moved up here, we had closed and moved out of the house in Atlanta and weren't ready to move in to this little house here in the other picture, which is where we still live, because the guy wasn't out of it yet. The house, when we bought it, was, still is, needs a lot of stuff done to it. It's borderline livable now. And [my wife became] a teacher in Lumpkin County and [my son] started at Woody Gap and was a junior down here. [They were] living out of that little one room forest service cabin, concrete floor, nothing underneath the darn thing, colder than a welldigger's butt. And, they would literally pull chairs up in front of the stove, a little wood stove that was in there, so that they could stay warm enough to do their assignments and lesson plans, and stuff like that.

Once Jim and his family settled into the community year-round, he began his daily commute of over 70 miles to his job in Atlanta for more than ten years, a dreary prospect for some, but not Jim.

> You know, I've told people the truck knew how to get there in the morning while I was still trying to wake up, and when I was coming home there are two points on Georgia 400 where you can look up and see Black Mountain on the left and Cedar Mountain on the right and Woody Gap right in the middle of it, and you know, it's hammer down time. I would catch myself going pretty fast sometimes, realizing I was heading home. It was all I could do to hold that truck back.

As Jim commuted to his job, he found ways to contribute to the community and to the school, earning money by transporting hikers to Woody Gap, a point on the Appalachian Trail. Besides earning money for the school and fire department, he was sometimes able to recruit his passengers to visit the school and to share their expertise. He provided students with a window to other's talents, experiences, and interests.

> The connection between me and the school and the trail is that when I was working in Atlanta, I let it be known to the Appalachian Trail Conference that I was running back and forth from Atlanta to Suches, which was every day, and

that I would be willing to shuttle hikers to either Amicolola Falls or to a trail crossing that is very close to the very beginning of the Appalachian Trail and do this in exchange for contributions to either the school or to the fire department. Well, it worked like a charm. It saved them money over what they would have had to pay if they used commercial transportation, which is either like the train or the bus from Atlanta to Gainesville, and then, a taxicab ride to where they were going, and you're talking sixty bucks for that. And most of them…you know, I never set a price on the whole thing, I just said, "Okay, whatever you're comfortable with." And I guess it usually averaged around twenty bucks. But you know, through March and April, it was probably four out of five days of every work week that I had, that I had hikers with me. One time, I had five of them in the back of the pick up truck. I don't know how I did that. I think that I said in the thing that I typed up was that if somebody that was coming through here, that I had shuttled a hiker was from some crazy, far away, exotic place or something like that, or if they just…you know, career-wise, if they, professionally, somehow or other, were interesting, [my wife] would just shanghai them, just run over to Gooch Gap and scoop them up and carry them down to the school, give them breakfast, make them talk to a couple of [my wife]'s classes; just give them lunch and then, carry them back up to the Gap and send them on their way again. There was one little gal from Quebec and I don't know what this had to do with [my wife]'s health occupations class, but she sent them a bunch of post cards before she came--we had set this one up ahead of time—for the kids to ask questions on, and they were going to mail the questions back to her on the post cards, and then, she was going to answer them when she came through there. Well, the kids were all so taken with the post cards, they wouldn't send them. She showed up and got this cold list of questions to answer, because the kids kept the post cards; she sent them picture post cards. So, she spent a day talking to the kids at the school.

About the time that Jim and his family started venturing out into the area, they came upon the first Indian Summer Festival, then a fledgling community and school activity that now draws yearly a crowd of around three thousand people.

> The first Indian Summer Festival they had was like 23 years ago now, and [my wife] and the kids and I just blundered on to it, didn't have a clue where Suches was or anything. We just happened to be driving around in the mountains. They had about a half a dozen tables just stuck out in the pasture out there. And they were selling funnel cakes and sausage biscuits and used books. And they had some craft items out there and it was to raise money for the basketball program. Because at that point, the county basically turned on the gym lights for the home games and gassed up the bus for away games, and if you wanted any more of these fancy extras like basketballs, uniforms, and officials, stuff like that, you scratched around for yourself. And then, we missed a couple of them, following that. And then, we were at Lake Winfield-Scott and came to the first one after we came up here. We ended up having a booth down there under the auspices of the forest service, passing out information. We have been connected with this Festival in one way or another since maybe '82 or thereabouts.

Theme: Outsiders and Rules for Conduct. Jim has lived in the Suches area for 17 years. Before moving to the area year-round, he lived in an urban setting and continued to commute to his job in Atlanta for over ten years. Now, his work keeps him closer to the home community. As one who has spent a great deal of time moving in and out of both a rural and an urban setting, Jim offers examples of some of the tensions and dynamics that he has observed between native and nonnative or residents and how those tensions impact the community.

> There's the issue of people moving into the county as opposed to the natives. And there is a certain break there. If you've got Harold and his family's lived here for 487 million years [and] if he's not particularly sensitive to the recently arrived residents, then newcomers are somewhat disenfranchised.... There is "last settler"

> syndrome here, too. And that causes problems at school and in the community at-large. There are a couple of people spread out amongst the school building down there that just absolutely hate the idea of anything new happening. There are a couple of people down there that are just incredibly provincial and would isolate, reisolate, this community, if they could.

Jim offers two paradoxes to illustrate how sometimes community members, native and nonnative, can be at cross-purposes with community values.

> People always say, "It's so quiet and pristine," and "I'm away from the rat race," and stuff like that. And the next thing you know, they are banging on the commissioner's door wanting street lights....
>
> You know, [natives] fail to remember that their grandparents were the ones who petition[ed] the governor to build a road from Dahlonega to Suches. And, when the governor said that there was no money for construction, they went out to build the damn thing themselves. They were that interested in having access for farm products. But it never was a one-way road.

Jim discussed how his family's religious beliefs have also created tension in the community as members try and decide how his wife's and his beliefs fit into the community's value system. He pointed out that, sometimes, by demonstrating one's values to the community, by being explicit about one's values and beliefs in a way that is palatable to the community, one is more likely to be accepted into the community by its members, but it isn't always the case. Sometimes, the differences between value systems are not reconciled.

> We are [of a particular faith], for god's sake, living right in the middle of Suches for a long, long time. And there are a lot of people who do not agree with the way we think of things.
>
> Alice: But you are still here, though. You've managed to stay here. Do you think everyone can persevere to that point?

Jim: Well, a number of things happen. Either they do not make the kind of commitment that exposes their values, or they come in here and don't get involved with the community at all, and in some cases, they leave. There was a former [employee] of the school down here who was [of a particular faith] that was basically run out of here, over primarily that, just a foreign way of looking at things….A lot of people around here don't understand that my value system is not a threat to them because I am not trying to impose it on them. But by the same token, they don't understand why I don't see that what is right for them should be right for me too.

Alice: So, you resist their values…I mean, you're comfortable with resisting those values that don't jive with yours?

Jim: Oh, yeah. Um hmm.

Alice: Do you feel that people who live in the community are…have to make that same decision that you are doing? …For example, if a [particular type of] student should go to Woody Gap School. Do you think that he or she would ever be accepted? Or [another particular type of] student? Do you think they would ever be accepted…you know, I hear the words "insider" and "outsider" a lot…although, I am beginning to think that you have to be pretty much born and raised here to be an insider.

Jim: The residence requirements for around here pretty much run into multiple generations. Yeah, a ... student would have a terrible time here. A [particular type of] student would have a tough time, particularly if he were conservative. You know, [my wife] and [another teacher]they go at it hammer and tongs at the lunch table down there over very, very real differences in religious beliefs and practices and the extent to which those beliefs that each of them hold should be imposed on every body else or no body else or what.

Jim acknowledges that some "outsiders" joining the school setting could face obstacles within the school community. Above, he describes his own wife's struggle to make her values explicit in the school setting. He further explains this tension between members' value systems (or their expressions) as a community issue when he relates how he and his wife became acquainted with local church communities.

> Alice: Well, another person that I talked to said that you can have a different value system as long as you are honest and open with it. But I have talked to another person who says that he doesn't feel comfortable with being open and honest with his belief system because of the fear of being ostracized or being run out. He said, "I feel like that there is something wrong with me, because I am in such a minority of my thinking."
>
> Jim: There are people around here that would want you to feel that way. And it's this business of some people to say, "I believe this way because it's right, and by god, it's right for everybody." ...The way we practice [our] faith is going to be looked at by a lot of people around here as foreign, and we are going to be set apart in some sense because of that. When we first moved here, from time to time, we would either go to [a particular local church] or [another local church]. I mean one is one mile one way, and the other is a mile in the other direction. And we know practically everyone that goes to those churches. Well, as it turned out, we moved in here the first weekend in October or November. On the following weekend, we went to church at [one location], where we had gone several times before. Well, we just barely beat the calling committee back to the house after that. Boom, here they come. The next week, we happened to go to [the other church]. The same thing happened. They are chasing us down the road on the way after church. Both cases, we were invited to join the church. Earnestly, sincerely, lovingly invited to join the church. We pointed out to them that we were terribly sorry, but that there were a great many differences in our theology of what they believed, and from a strictly practical point of view, if nothing else, we stand up in church every Sunday and say we believe in one baptism for the remission of sin, and we have both been baptized, and we would not be accepted in those

> congregations unless we were rebaptized. And [my wife] says succinctly, "I'm sorry, but it took the first time!"

Although Jim and his wife do not practice the same religious customs as most of their neighbors, they attend the local church services from time to time to be with members and to have fellowship.

> What we told them in both cases was, "If you don't mind, we would like the opportunity to come and worship with you from time to time and fellowship with you from time to time, but we ain't going to put our names on the list." They said, "That's fine." But by the same token, since then, there have been a number of pastoral changes in both of those churches and there was an occasion in one, quite real, where the pastor was not a big fan of any [one] who was not [of a particular faith] and a very conservative [member of a particular religious denomination]. And there have been a couple of other cases where comments have been made, sometimes just in passing. Well, I generally try to launch a preemptive strike on that kind of stuff. One time we went to [a particular local] church. The young guy who was the pastor at the time was new, and I had met him for the first time fairly recently before that. When I met him, I said, "How do you do. I'm Jim, and you need to know that I am the resident heathen. [My wife] and I are [of a particular faith]" So, [the preacher] stands up and is recognizing that so-and-so is visiting such-and-such a family and so-and-so is back visiting, and "We would like to welcome them back. And I notice that our resident heathens Jim and [his wife] are out here." And he said it in a very loving, decent way. And all of those deacons are down there going "Ooh," and their thinking that either God is going to strike him dead for having said that or strike us dead for being in the church. And at that point [a friend] and [another friend] who were in the sanctuary that morning, climbed all over everybody trying to take credit for having laid that moniker on us. I've been telling everybody ever since, that no, that was a self-inflicted term.

Jim and his wife work to balance their own religious beliefs with their fellow community members. Residing in the community for a number of years, teaching school, participating in community and school activities, working as volunteers with community organizations provided Jim and his wife with opportunities to demonstrate their values to community members and to contribute their own values to the community.

Despite differences in religious customs and practices, Jim has found instances that demonstrate that there exists a bond among some members of the community who differ that supersede tensions between groups. When he describes his mental photograph, Jim provides an example that represents how he has come to appreciate community members cooperating and enjoying each other's company regardless of religious affiliation. His story takes place on the school campus.

> I wish I had taken a picture of one of the churches just to be representative of that they have had a number of times community-wide revivals in the gym when the rain's bad. I think they are going to have another one this summer down on the field down there. And they all get together and do that and use the school facilities. . . .[Once] when one of those community-wide revivals was about to start, [a teacher in the school] owned a piano that they were going to use and put down in the gym because there was no way they could haul that big grand piano out of [the school library]. So, [a community member's] pickup truck, a member of [a local church], was used to pick up the piano from someone who was a member of [another church], and another [community member] who, at the time,

> was a semi-practicing [member of a different faith], and me, [a member of a different faith], are down there putting this piano in the back of this truck. And, as we're driving down the road in this pickup truck, this cloud came up out of nowhere, thunder and everything. You know, you don't want pianos to get wet! So, here's the pickup truck going down the road, hell-bent for leather--he's driving like crazy down the road--and I'm hanging out...oh, the other one that was in there was [another community member] who is a nonpracticing [member of another faith]. So, you've got this pretty broad spectrum of denominational involvement in the whole thing. The truck is hurling down the road and there's the three of us hanging onto that piano for dear life and [one fellow] is sitting on the side of the truck, keyboard exposed, playing honky-tonk! But, you know, the piano went down there from one of the churches member's houses so that all of the churches in the community could get together and have a revival in the school gym.

Jim has provided an illustration that highlights what he has seen as a long time member of the community: despite differences in beliefs, community members, both insiders and outsiders, work and socialize together in positive and productive ways. Often, the setting for these interactions is the school campus. In turn, the school depends on community members and agencies, such as the fire department and the local churches to provide services such as fire protection, after-school programs, and housing for its Pre-K program. Community support of the school provides opportunities for constant interactions between the school and community.

Question 2: School and Community Interactions

Theme: Centers for School and Community Interaction. As Jim and his family became acquainted with the community, they found several places in the Suches community that are important centers for gathering and disseminating information, often the information centered around community and school activities and allowed interactions between school members and community members.

The Suches General Store is the hub of the community where all sorts of community as well as store business is transacted. It can be a handy place for impromptu parent/teacher conferences, passing school information to the fire department folks, finding UPS that was left there when the school was closed, etc

The General Store. If it doesn't happen at the General Store in Suches, everybody there knows where it was that it happened and who all is involved in it. We had a new septic system put in the house one time. The guy who put the septic system in had trouble and had gotten into some of the other plumbing, just tore the bejabbers out of the whole thing. I heard about it from two different people at the General Store before I got to the house to find out from the guy who was doing the work. And, [my wife], she will probably tell you that she has had as many parent conferences at the General Store than she has had in her classroom, but that sort of stuff happens down there. We, the fire department, have gotten enough members gathered up at one time or another down there to make a probably questionable quorum and make decisions about what was going to happen with the department, you know. Like I said, all kinds of news happens or gets reported there.

> *Post offices are part of the glue that holds small communities together and provides their identity. Unlike in the big cities, they will call on the phone to tell you they have a parcel too big for your box instead of serving you with a "notice of attempted mail delivery." They touch the community and school in many ways including sponsoring a booth at the Indian Summer Festival.*

> The Post Office. A lot of small communities make a huge to do: "You can't take our post office!" There's some visceral thing about being able to get a cancellation that says Suches; I don't know. It doesn't move mail any faster or any slower, but it gets in your gut, and a lot of people think…a lot of people can remember when the deal was not delivery but going to the post office to pick up your mail, that the post offices, which were quite frequently in the stores in the old days, were a part of the community center the way the General Store is now. I think it's practically…it's less an issue now than it was. But, Francis, the postmistress down there, for the last two years has had a booth at the Indian Summer Festival, for the post office! I mean, I didn't know whether they were going to advertise it and stuff like that. And, there was some talk last year that didn't happen about the possibility of having a special cancellation for the Festival, which you can do. So, we may end up doing some of that. That would be pretty…you know, post office involvement in the Sports Club, which means in the Indian Summer Festival, which means helping the school in some way or the other.

In describing the General Store and the Post Office, Jim mentions connections between school and community. At the General Store, his wife has impromptu discussions with some of the parents of her students, and he describes how the post office is involved with the Indian Summer Festival, an event that provides the school with economic resources. Jim includes the local volunteer fire station as another center that is important for the community and school.

The fire department is entwined with the school in more ways than I'll be able to remember. We use the school gym for fundraiser square dances. The Sports Club meets here to plan the Indian Summer Festival, which benefits the school. The school kids come to the station for fire safety education. The fire department gets water from a dry hydrant on the school grounds and then sprays it on the gym for training. The department gives a scholarship to a graduate each year. Some of which have been used for EMT training by graduates who have become firefighters. We borrow chairs and projectors and CPR mannequins and use them to teach CPR to the faculty and students. The original one bay station is on loan to the Pre-K program, and we have squeezed six vehicles into the three bay station and the original station's annex which also contains generators to power the school in emergencies and barricades used for parking control at the festival as well as voting machines.

And there's these photos that have to do with the fire department….The fire department, I think, is with, along with the school, those are the two primary globs of glue that hold the community together. And, I am not at all objective about either one of those. The fire department has been active, proactive, looking for opportunities to go beyond what I refer to as our bells and whistles things, the hoses and sirens things. We, you know, give a scholarship to one of the graduates every year. It's not much, but it's recognition that we are part of the community. We will have Community Appreciation Dinner every year where the fire department feeds the community instead of the other way around. Sometimes we cook [the dinner] down there, in the school, and then, bring it up here. We've had the thing at the school a bunch of times. But even if we don't have it at the school, we go down there and steal all of the cafeteria chairs and tables for everybody to sit at. It's just another one of the ways when this whole thing interfaces more like teeth on a gear wheel, then just flat, slapped together kind of thing.

Jim explains how the fire department came about and how it gained importance in its standing in the community and the school.

One of the original bays…was built primarily as a voting booth or place when the state said that you had to have hot cold running water and flush toilets in all the polling places. We used to have eleven precincts in this county. And the commissioner says, "I ain't gonna go out and buy eleven damn toilets. I'll buy five." And he got a grant from Georgia Forestry to build these polling places with garage doors in the front of them and they gave all of these outlying precincts a fire knocker, and boom! You've got a ready-made fire department. Anyway, the original fire department is now where the pre-K program is, and it is on indefinite loan. We're hoping that we'll get it back when they get done messing around at the school down here. You've got all of these little bitty rugrats having to walk across the road a couple times a day for lunch and stuff like that. Anyway, that's what we started out in right there. We added this annex thing which is getting a little bit ratty these days. When we got another vehicle and what that then grew in to was the current building; the one that we're…the fire department is primarily in now and the one that you and I are in right now, is this three bay thing. But if you notice, there's five vehicles in a three bay building and another one in the annex over there, part of which is so that we can give appropriate space to the pre-K program. Now, admittedly, we have obtained several of these vehicles since we told them that they could use that over there.

Alice: So, you're a little crowded now?

Jim: Yeah, but you know, we've got the first-out vehicles all in front of the doors. The smaller ones that are secondary response vehicles and we can get them out about well enough.

Through the years, Jim has become more deeply involved with community organizations and assumed leadership roles within those organizations. Being where the action is, positioned to make decisions that impact and influence community activity, and having knowledge of the historical basis for organizational actions, gives Jim a vantagepoint for making detailed observations about aspects of the community's relationship with its school.

Theme: Mutual Reliance. As Jim describes the connections between the school, and community, it becomes clear that he sees a relationship that is deeply intertwined. He explains this mutual reliance within a discussion about the fire department's connection to the school.

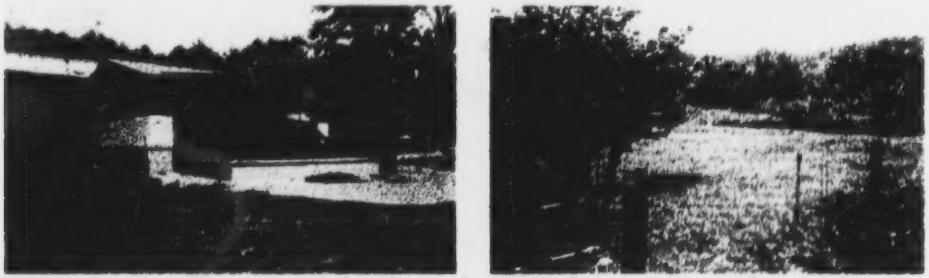
We're going to bury two tanks at the station to improve our supply of clean water. We will draw the water out of the tanks through a hydrant, which will be supplied by the school, and they will have access to a huge water source if there is ever a fire at the school.

> The fire department goes down on to the school property and pumps water out of a dry hydrant that's in a branch down behind the school, sprays it all over the school. We just pretend that the roof is on fire, throw big ladders up against it and climb up there with hoses. We do that in the evening. Um, we've used the concession stand down there and the stage and stuff like that as parts of a venue for training scenarios that we've run. We are going to plumb a line down the bank and put a hydrant, probably on our side of the road. But what will happen then, if anything happens at the school, there's going to be 20,000 gallons available to put a fire out, and if you can't put it out with 20,000 gallons of water, you aren't going to put it out under any circumstances. The other thing is that we were trying

> to figure out where we are going to get the money to buy the hydrant. I mean it doesn't look like much sticking out of the ground, but they are pretty expensive. The school system is going to buy it. That's a nice mutual round-robin backing scratching thing there. But that's just another example of school and community cooperation.

In his discussion of the fire department's activities, Jim has listed a number of ways the school and the fire department, like teeth on a gear wheel, help each other. The fire department needs a place to practice its skills, and the school addresses this need by giving the department access to its campus. The school is isolated, and so, vulnerable to loss if it should face a fire. The fire department secures the school's safety by stocking a water supply large enough to rescue the school in the event of a fire. The department needs a hydrant to disperse water for drills and for protecting the school, and the school pays for the hydrant so that the fire department can protect the school. In helping each other, both agencies help themselves.

It is apparent that the fire department is protective of Woody Gap School, as is the local school booster organization, the Woody Gap Sports Club. Many of the department's volunteer fire fighters are also members of the Woody Gap Sports Club. This organization used to focus mainly on providing economic support for the school's sports programs. Now it supplements the school with funds for administrative costs, stipends for teaching supplies, and scholarships for graduates. The Club does its fundraising by producing the annual Indian Summer Festival.



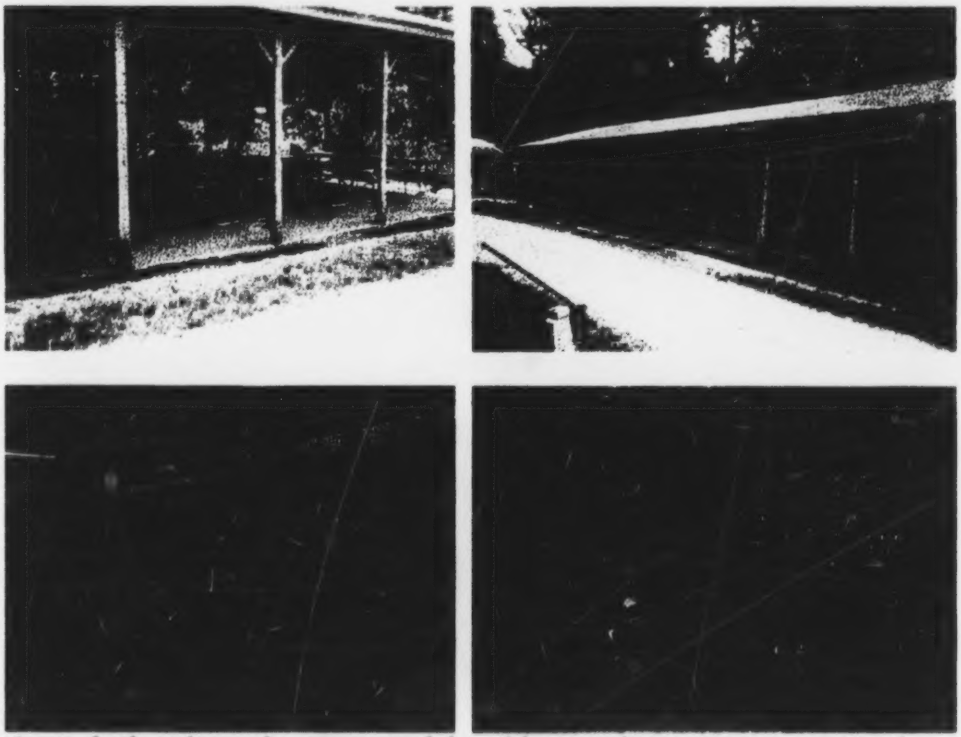
Twenty-three years ago some faculty and parents became aware that on the eve of basketball season there were no uniforms, no basketballs, and no money for them or for referees or anything else for that matter. They borrowed part of Walter

Woody's pasture alongside the road and set up some school tables and sold sausage biscuits, funnel cakes, used books, craft items, and whatever else would earn some money for the basketball teams. Home-grown entertainment was soon added to the home-grown produce, first performed on the ground, then from a borrowed hay trailer, and finally, to a succession of constructed stages ending, we hope, with the present one which is looking a lot more permanent than any of the others. All of these were constructed with largely volunteer labor which included a former custodian, a former principal, husbands of teachers, friends of sports club members who drove up from Atlanta to help out. This list extends to nearly every one in Suches who owns a hammer, and we have come as close to the wire as roofing the stage in the dark on a Thursday before a Saturday start.

Sports Club stuff. I have a whole bunch of pictures here that have to do with that. There's all these pictures that have to do with the Sports Club. The first one in that list was, is a picture of Walter Woody's pasture and that was were the first Indian Summer Festival was held.

The food concession quickly moved off the library tables into a small concession trailer (borrowed from the fire department) and coke trailer for drinks. This too was soon outgrown and a permanent concession building was constructed in stages.

The growth of the whole thing is this little brown trailer…a concession trailer. It has belonged to this fire department since 1983. I don't know who had it for a couple of years in the interim, but before that it belonged to an old Suches fire and rescue squad. It was a concession thing and a kind of an emergency operation center, if they ever needed it for that, which I don't think they did. At one point, long with one of those little eight-foot square trailers Coke people bring along, that was the entire concession operation. And they sold, I don't know, like 500 pounds of barbecued pork. I mean, they'd push it in the door in the back and send it out the window at the other end. And that was the whole thing.



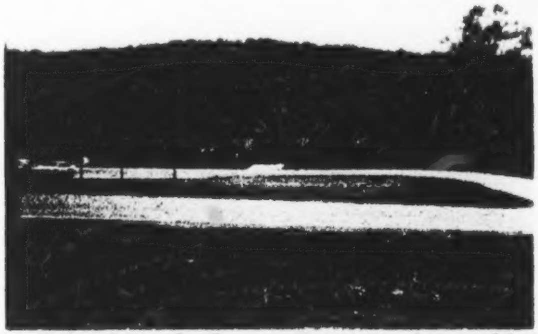
Again, built with mostly community labor, [there are] now areas on campus for cooking, [food] preparation, serving, and eating.

Somewhere along the line, [the Sports Club] started building the concession building. And, first, what I would refer to as the center section which was for serving and dishing stuff up. Then they discovered they were having a little bit of trouble with the gas grills blowing out when a wind came up, so they built an area to enclose them. Then subsequent to that, they got a little bit crowded in there and hot. So we built it a little bit bigger.... There was a lot of community involvement. I mean, if the Sports Club didn't build it, they hired it done. Anyway, they put that addition on the left side of the building, which is where the big cookers are. Again, it turns around for school use. The tractor they use for the lawn is in there during the year. That's the tractor garage. And [a teacher] has gone there and rewired the panel box down there to get a 220 outlet and taken a kiln down there and done some sort, I don't know, ceramic work. And [another teacher] will be using that [area] to can the produce she's grown in that little patch across the branch down there for part of her [local studies] program.

Anyway, it will very shortly be publicly known as widely as we can publicize it that it is available for people to go down there and use. You know, I don't know how much the thing would cost if you went out and hired someone to replicate. It's worth way more than the cost of the thing was, because of the fact that there is so much volunteer labor in it. The guy that was a resident of the community here, was a member of the Sports Club, went down there and just painted the hell out of everything down there one year. I mean, that's what he did for a living. He took a couple days off from work, went down there, and painted like crazy. When the stage was rebuilt two years ago, I think it was, we…somebody went down there, dug the whole thing up, hauled all the trash away for us. The custodian at the school at the time had kind of an odd evening shift. He would come in at 11 o'clock in the morning to work. He came in every morning for like three weeks and laid block. And drug my sorry butt down there with him. He did that and the county commissioner paid for the concrete to pour the pad. And then we bought lumber and tin and stuff like that. A member of the Sports Club went down there and oversaw the construction of that whole thing that involved anybody in Suches with a hammer. I mean you walk down the road with a hammer in your hand, and all of a sudden, by God, you're working on that concession stand. And there are some friends who spent a Saturday, practically from sunup to sunset, working on that darn thing. They didn't get as far as they thought they would, so they took a day off from work to help finish the darn thing up. [Another community member] came down and if he didn't spend forty hours on it, he wasn't there at all. He wired the stage, wired the power that goes out on either side of the stage for the booths that need electrical power during the Festival. [He] got the thing up to code, up to snuff and it works like a charm. And

> when he got done with the whole thing he wandered over to the concession stand to let us know that he was done with it, after he had given at least a weeks worth, maybe even more than that, and then rewired the concession stand.

With his involvement in community activities, Jim has first hand knowledge of the community's commitment to its local school. Jim emphasizes what he sees as the reciprocal relationship between school and community that is holistic and historical.



The Woody Gap School was built on community donated land, from community adapted plans, with community donated materials, stands in front of community constructed rec fields, on the edge of which stand community built facilities which are used to enhance the education of the community's children; and the school in turn enriches the community by providing a home for community activities ranging form square dances to organization meeting space to community-wide revivals. Educators like to say that schools cannot exist apart from the community, and it's probably widely true--never more so than in Suches where one can never tell for sure where one aspect of community life ends and another begins.

> If the school wasn't there, there would be an awful lot of traffic between here and Blairsville and between here and Dahlonega to cover some of these social things that happen around here and to cover some of the recreational things. I mean, when we first came here, and I think I said something about this in the notes I wrote, [my wife] came down here to see the principal, on the eve of school closing, if [their son] could come down and use that outdoor basketball goal down there. And the guy that was the principal said, "The truth of the matter is, we don't lock the gym in the summertime. We just leave it open," and he says, "The

> last thing I do before I go off for the summer is roll a couple of basketballs out on the floor."

Jim has an appreciation for what the community of Suches and Woody Gap School can offer its residents. As an active volunteer, he commits to hard work and dedication so his community will to continue to be a vibrant place to live. Community members living in this rural setting have a hand in the myriad of responsibilities and tasks essential for sustaining it and allow them to demonstrate their range of skills and talents.

> You know, here we go changing hats. That seems to be the most popular activity in Suches for those people who get involved in things, is standing in front of the shelf in the morning trying to figure out which hat to put on before you leave the house.

As Jim and I were winding down our discussion about Woody Gap School and the community of Suches, I asked him to think about his vision for a better school and a better community. His reply focused on problems he perceived to be with the bureaucratic organization and political hierarchies of schooling.

Jim's Vision for the Future of the Relationship Between School and Community

Jim hopes that his community will resist dichotomizing its membership. Instead, he urges it to recognize that change, such as the increased presence of technology, may be unavoidable for Suches. He suggested that change may encourage community members to refocus on those values they hold most dear, while adapting their thinking to accommodate a more diverse perspective of acceptable community standards.

> My point has always been, not listened to by hardly anybody, that change is an inevitable thing, you can not stop it. There is not enough metal in the world to build a gate at Woody Gap that is going to keep things out. And if you see change threatening your way of life, you've got to retrench . . . the minimum position that should be taken is to retrench . . . you can't prevent [change] from changing the values of the community. Because that's what these people are coming in for. There is something here that they like. And it ends up, I think, being a values

thing more than anything else. We aren't plowing the fields with mules....And if you are going to let the technology come in...[you have to] realize that there is a lot of stuff in-between. Change is going to happen. People are going to come to this community. They are going to bring new ideas, a lot of which are foreign to the way of doing things to the people who are here.

Alice: Well, when you think about Woody Gap School and the community, and you see your idea, your vision for improvement, what would that be? Do you see a more improved or a different school or community?

Jim: I don't know...I don't know whether there is any real kind of things that need to be done down there. I mean it's a good school. It's got more potential and promise than performance at this point, but I don't think that there is hardly any school in the country you can't say that about. There is, I think, a certain amount of...factionalism within the school, and I think that needs to be dealt with. There is, in terms of problems, people in the community and people in the school administration [who] do not understand how counterproductive it is for some pissed-off parent to [go to] the school board member that serves our area, and say, "Do something about this." It is not [the school board member's] job to deal with discipline problems at the school. It's his job to formulate policy that deals with those things, make that policy known to [the school superintendent] who should communicate it to [the principal] who, with the teachers, should deal with it....You could say all kinds of bad things about bureaucracies. One of the worst things I think you can say about them is that there is a tendency to try and avoid the chain of command of things. And when you do that, you never know where an issue is going to reside, and who is going to deal with it--whether the person who is dealing with it is appropriate or not....If [a teacher] went to our school board representative with some sort of problem, and he said, "Yeah, I'll take care of it." And, in the meantime, if somebody else in the school was involved with the same problem, went to [the principal] and he said, "Let's do it this way," and the two of

> them are at cross purposes, then you've got someone who should be a policy maker, administering things and somebody who is supposed to be administering things getting mixed messages and that has always been a problem in this community. And it goes back to the good old boy way of doing things. And it still happens. Everybody thinks you can go to the head of the organization and get something.

Jim's speculation about community members' reactions to school policy and politically-charged interruptions in the school's hierarchies are based on what he has observed as a longtime active member in the community and as a regular volunteer and visitor to the school. His concern for the school and its relationship with the community is seasoned with the experience that comes with age and with participation in local affairs. He sees potential for improving the school and community relationship, and as an active community member, plans to have a continued hand in strengthening the bond between the two entities.

Mary

Mary has taught school at Woody Gap for the duration of her 13-year career in education. She became interested in teaching because of her involvement with the school as a community member, school substitute, and parent volunteer. In the classroom, Mary teaches community studies as a major component of her curriculum. A leader in the Woody Gap's Rural Schools and Community Trust grant, Mary incorporates its "placed-based" education approach into her plans. Place-based education is an approach to curriculum designed to encourage students, teachers, and community members to collaborate in local issue studies projects and presentations.

As a community member, Mary is involved with a several activities that also focus on local studies. For example, she is active in the area's historical society, currently assisting with a project that focuses on the preservation and publication of historical archives of that describe past social activities and community functions. She has also written a history of her local church. This history includes testimonials from church elders in which they describe what it was like to grow up in the Cooper Creek District (a part of Suches). Mary also volunteers her time to the upkeep of local cemeteries and to organize local cultural observances and ceremonies.

Mary's community and school interests and experiences make her a resource who can provide a rich descriptive accounting of what she sees as important aspects of the relationship between school and its community. Mary's discussion illustrates how the bond between school and community has been maintained through school and community interactions and how that bond has also changed over the years.

Question 2: School and Community Interactions

Theme: Mutual Reliance. Mary is a walking "database" of knowledge when it comes to describing the types of activities and functions involving members of the school and the community and take place on the school grounds. The activities, events, celebrations, and rituals she lists are examples of a mutual reliance between school and community and range from the complex orchestration of a multi-day community festival to the community use of the school's copying machine. Through her photographs and photofeedback, Mary created a "tour" of sorts of the campus, highlighting those areas of that for her represent a variety of school and community interactions; many of which have been either maintained or changed through the years.

This picture is of the copy machine in the teacher's work room. Elder citizens depend on the school copier for use in photo copying official documents. Without this access at the school senior citizens might need to drive as far as 17 miles to have access to a copier.

People, especially, elder people, you know, something comes in the mail, and they need a duplicate to send to Social Security or Veteran's Administration. And they get in a panic sort of, so it helps them to have the convenience of the access, because some of them don't drive and they might have to wait for somebody to take them somewhere else to get it copied.

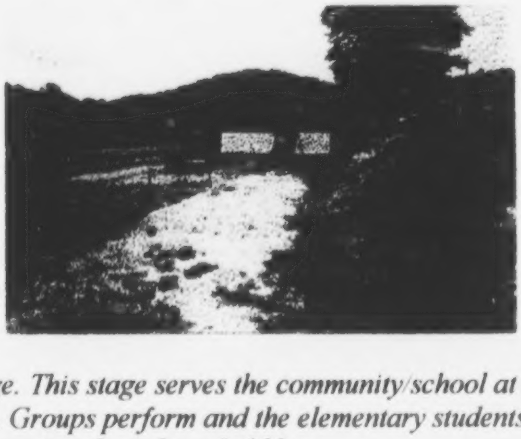
Alice: Do other people use it besides senior citizens?

Mary: Yes, there was one lady that used it. She had kind of like a little flower business, and she would run off her brochures. And of course, she would reimburse the school; she paid for the copies. At one time, the churches paid to have copies here for their Sunday programs. I don't think they do that now.

Alice: Okay. Anything else you want to say about this picture?

Mary: Well, announcements…we'll run Indian Summer Festival announcements to raise money for the school, of course. It's a community-school project….The community-school newspaper is run on it. And the fire department has put out flyers. So, various people in the community use it, have access to it.

From the copy machine, Mary next takes us to school's outdoor stage and the pavilion.



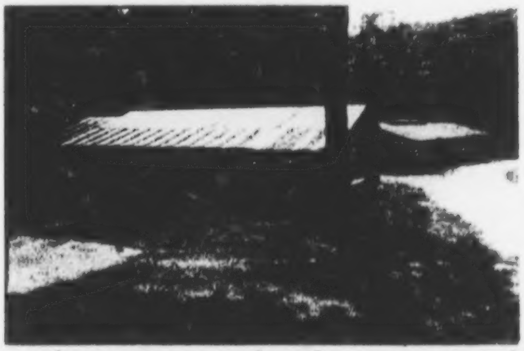
Outdoor Stage. This stage serves the community/school at Indian Summer Festival time. Groups perform and the elementary students do a play. Also, graduation exercises have been held here.

Alice: Alright, the second picture is a stage, and you mentioned that Indian Summer Festival when you wrote about the stage, and that graduation exercises have been held here. Looking again at this picture, is there anything else occurred about it, in your thinking? Do you know when that stage was built?

Mary: Well, this is a new one. This is the third one on that particular spot. So, it serves as a community function. The entertainment for the Festival as well as…well, I use it sometimes as an outdoor classroom. When I used to teach music, we used to go out there so that our singing wouldn't bother anybody in the building. See, when I taught elementary, I taught music out there.

Alice: So, this is third one. Has there been one pretty much with the history of the school, do you know?

Mary: No, it's kind of a new thing, but it was just sort of slapped up in the beginning, you know, and just sort of evolved into this nice performance area, because of the usage.



Pavilion. This pavilion serves as a place for community/school picnics. It is an extension as an outdoor classroom in summer. The branch behind it has a variety of native wildflowers and plants that blossom in the spring which is used as an outdoor study. The teachers and parent volunteers use this pavilion as a place to grill food for the Indian Summer Festival. Money from this project is divided and enables teachers to buy supplementals for their individual classes.

Alice: Okay…and this is the pavilion. And you talked about the branch running behind it, providing wildflowers and plants. My first experience with it was the yard sale. That was a lot of fun. And people from the community came down for that. Um, anything you want to add to that one?

Mary: Okay…I have done cooking projects with my class and taken them there. And had parents come in for like a wrap-up day. And, used to, when I taught fourth and fifth grade, I had a time at the end of the unit when I had Cowboy Day, for the western unit. I had my U.S. histories combined, and we would go down to the pavilion and sing our songs and the parents would come in and do hotdogs and sing around the fire.

Alice: So, you had a small community-school activity going on there.

Mary: And I even purchased the pitchfork so that I could put duplicates of hotdogs on them so that I could roast them on the fire.

Although she no longer teaches music and her curriculum has changed so that she is not able to spare the time to teach her Cowboy Day unit, Mary still felt that the stage and pavilion spaces were important places to include in her consideration of possible connections between school and for community. The multiple use that these facilities provide allows for a variety of levels of interactions between school and community members.

The next stop on the "tour" takes us to the recycling center located on campus, a place where school members and community members can contribute to the school and to the community, while demonstrating an awareness of collaboration, sound environmental practices, and the individual costs of garbage disposal.

The Recycling Project. The recycling project is a success because of the distance to a recycling point. This service helps the community members dispose of their aluminum as well as contribute to the school.

There's a lot of people you have to pick your garbage up, so this helps the people in the community. They can put their aluminum cans in there.

Alice: So, they feel free to just come down and dump their cans?

Mary: Um hmm, anytime.

Alice: The proceeds go to the school?

Mary: Yes. They feel like they are helping the school.

Alice: So, where would you have to go if you didn't…

Mary: Um, the nearest recycling for aluminum cans is probably Morgantown, which is north of here, which is probably 35 miles. Then Mr.--, this is his science money, he carries them to Gainesville, so that's about 45 miles he takes them.

As the pivotal drop off point for recycling, the school is reinforced as a community center for its members. Through human resources provided by the teachers and students who sustain the recycling effort, the school provides a service to the community, while the community provides economic capital for the school by way of aluminum donations converted to cash.

Another reciprocal interchange that emphasizes the school as a community center may be found at the school's greenhouse, the next stop on the "tour."

The new green house was an added addition to the school/community relationships. Community members could purchase plants in their own neighborhood. Again, the school providing a service and the community members responding. This project could lead to one source of sustainability for the community in the future.

> The greenhouse is a new adage to the community or to the school and the community. It was very successful because it provided plants to the people in this area. And the fact that our seasons are a little bit different than seasons outside this community makes it extra special nice, because the plants are more suited to this area and our time of year when we need them. Because our gardens are like two or three weeks later than they are even in Dahlonega. And that is the reason why we are still here—because of the weather and the location. It keeps us isolated.

Once again, as Mary points out, the school is providing a service. The vocational teacher and high school students purchase and cultivate plants that are sold to community members. Community members not only benefit from being able to buy from a convenient location, saving time and fuel, but they also benefit by having plant varieties provided that are hardy and viable for the area. Community members reciprocate by providing economic capital, used to sustain the school's greenhouse program. The greenhouse may also create social capital by providing a place where community members can visit and exchange information.

The school has other facilities that may be used for increasing economic and social capital for the community. Sometimes, other community resources such as the fire station or day-care center use these facilities.

The Gym. The Woody Gap School gymnasium has been an asset to the community in many ways. Numerous organizations have used this faculty to raise funds. One example is the volunteer fire department sponsors square dances in order to purchase equipment to help them provide better service to community members.

Alice: Now, I liked what you were talking about on the gymnasium, about the fact that it's used as a facility throughout the neighborhood. Can you talk a little bit more about the activities?

Mary: Well, the community has been…well, one of the churches uses it for their youth group one night of the week, now. And they come and do sports and activities with them in the gymnasium.…We've had karate classes taught in there in the past. We've had clogging lessons taught by people in the community. This gym was filmed in a documentary one time. The title of it was by CBS. We had a nurse practitioner at the clinic, and the title was something to the effect, *The Doctor is a Nurse*, because she served the capacity of the community. We didn't have a doctor. So we had a documentary filmed in it at one time.

Alice: I would love to see it.

Mary: It's really old. It's 20 years old. It was about 20 years ago, because I remember that my son was in kindergarten. At that particular time, they were having a square dance in the gym to raise money for the fire department. And the CBS network came and filmed that, and filmed the nurse participating in the square dance. Oh, there's all kinds of history. I know when Ms. – had the daycare center up in Suches for four-year-olds, before we had a four-year-old program, they did fundraisers there to help finance the daycare center. So, the gymnasium has really been an asset to the community.

The gym is a place used by the community for raising economic capital, and, consequently, social activities. Sometimes, places on campus provide settings for social purposes, places on Mary's "tour" such as the school's ball fields, playground, and creek.

The Ball Fields. The school ball field has served the community/school by hosting numerous gatherings such as a back to school softball games and cook outs.... The community churches compete in softball games on this field.

Alice: Well, here you have number seven, the school ball field that "serves the school and community by hosting numerous gatherings, um, cookouts. I've seen pictures of the cookouts. They look great. Do you have folks that come that don't have children at the school?

Mary: Oh yeah, everybody in the community is invited. Anytime anything goes on, they usually will come out to, you know, to encourage the kids, to support... well, most of them have grandkids.

Tennis Courts. The tennis courts serve the community and school. These courts are open and community members may use them. The community was instrumental is helping with this project.

Alice: Number 13 is tennis courts. Now is that pretty new?

Mary: Yes, they were added after the gymnasium. That was before I came here. I guess that's been about 15 years ago. When they renovated the building the last time is when it was, about that time period.

Alice: I think it's a great idea, because for the small size of the school, tennis is an individual or team sport.

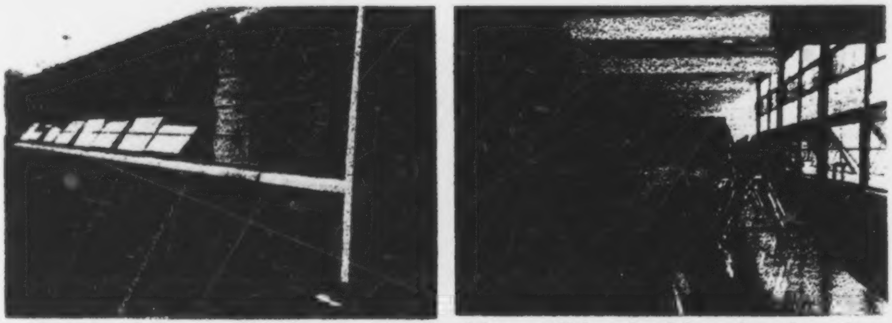
Mary: Well, when they started they didn't have a tennis team. It was there basically for community and school. They've only had a tennis team just the last few years. So it was intended, I think, pretty much, intended to be just a multiple use.

The Playground. Community members use the playground during the summer with their children.

Alice: And here you have the playground. You talked about how the community members used the playground in the summer, which I thought was interesting.

Mary: They do. They bring their kids to play on the swings and the slide. It's just like a city park. It really is. And of course, they use the stream down there to fish in. They stock trout in the stream. And then, the kindergarten teacher, when she has the Parent-Student Involvement Day-- she has the dads come in and go fishing with the kindergartners in the creek behind there.... The local fish hatchery [stocks the trout].

Community members can make casual use of the school grounds in conjunction with school activities or after hours. Other activities may warrant a more formal environment and are often held in the school cafeteria.



The Lunch Room. The lunch room building will be eligible to be placed on the National Historic Register of Building in a few years. This building reflects another growth of the community/school. Families meet here for reunions on occasion. The Gaddistown Homemakers Club uses this facility to raise funds. In turn, they give scholarships to students graduating from Woody Gap. After Easter sunrise services, the local church members have refreshments.

The lunchroom is a multiple use building. I mean, the Gaddistown Homemakers have used it to do bake sales; the church and community use it for doing biscuit and sausage after the Sunrise Service that they have up on top of Woody Mountain; um, people use it for gatherings for homecomings. One lady had her wedding reception there, afterwards. You know, it is a multiple use community building, rather than just the lunchroom.

Alice: Is it pretty easy to get access to it, if you are a member of the community?

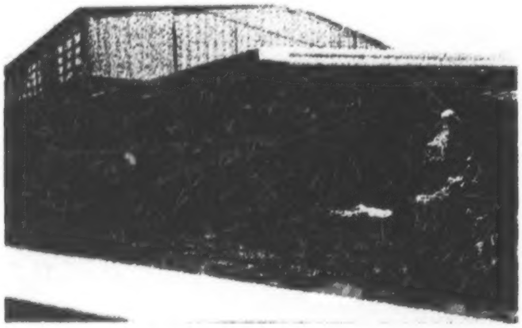
Mary: Oh yes. You just have to clear it with [the principal], and tell him in advance and make sure you clean up afterwards: the only requirement is to leave it as neatly as you found it.....And they have had housewarming showers there and baby showers. I know when my house burned, they gave me a household shower there.

Alice: I didn't know your house burned down...

Mary: Yes, that was in 1984...you know, it's a multiple purpose/use building. You know, the churches have their little, you know, whatevers, but whenever everybody comes together for something really big, then it serves as the multiple use...it brings...like all of the six or eight little community churches use it for a multiple gathering, like they did for my household shower.

Sometimes, the aim of the activities is to provide individual help and support for its community members. Mary provided examples of this assistance: baby showers, wedding showers and receptions, meals, and household showers. Once again, the school is a community center where members may congregate to problem solve and to continue to touch base with each other.

When community members organize and provide activities that are located on the school campus, opportunities are created for playing out those community values that members who sponsor the activities and who attend the activities consider to be important. These events might involve whole families or is specific to age, gender, or interests. Here younger generations might observe and practice values the older generations learned from their elders. Some events emphasize supporting the school.



The only place in Suches in the winter time for entertainment outside church is the gymnasium. Students and community members meet and show their support of the ball teams. This building shows the growth of the community school in its third decade. Parents and Grandparents of several of the students have played basketball on this same court.

Alice: Let's see, I thought it was interesting that you used the gymnasium again, but to talk about a different thing. You talked about it being, in the wintertime, the only place outside the church as a place of entertainment. Do you want to talk a little bit more about that?

Mary: Well, that's the main thing—everybody in the community—they come to the ballgames; they support the ballgames. And you know, with an athletic department, they have to have funding. And if the community didn't come out and support the ballteam, there wouldn't be enough funds from just the student involvement to even pay the referees….And it gives people a chance to see each other and catch up with what's going on with those they might not ordinarily see…they are, they really are very supportive. It's the big thing to do in Suches. The event is to come out and support the students and come to the ballgame.

Alice: They still have basketball teams here, right?

Mary: We still have basketball games.

Theme: Past Activities Involving School and Community. As times change, so do some of the school and community functions and traditions. Because Woody Gap School and Suches are so small, the maintenance of traditions is dependent on contributions from local school and community volunteers. Some activities and traditions are still cherished and maintained by the community, while are left to fallow.

*The Basement. **"The Basement " has served the community /school in some strange ways. It was the first school cafeteria. Members in the community brought fresh garden vegetables to be cooked here. Later, it was used as a haunted house for school Halloween Carnivals.***

Alice: And, here's the basement. It does have a draw for people, doesn't it?

Mary: It has a character of its own.

Alice: It does. You can feel it when you open the doors and walk inside.

Mary: They even taught shop class in there, and construction, at one time. So, it's had many faces throughout the process.

Alice: I imagine a few people banged their heads among the rafters, it's so low in there.

Mary: We did get the heating system put in, and it was put in there after the lunchroom was moved out. Because, up to that point, they had wood heaters in the room.

Alice: Right, Mr.—talked about making a pallet in there, to keep that boiler going.

Mary: It's just a whole character in itself. It makes a spooky spook house (both laugh).

Alice: Do you all still do that?

Mary: We haven't had [it] in a few years. That's kind of taken a back burner for some reason.

Alice: It used to be kind of a big deal, wasn't it?

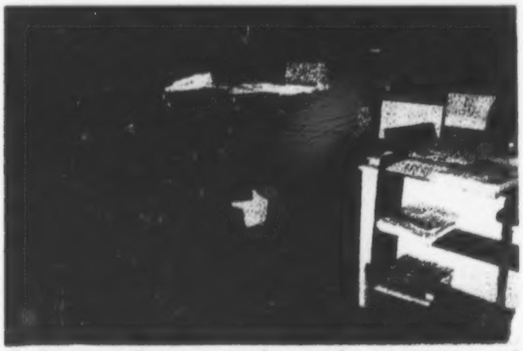
Mary: Oh, yes, it was a real big deal, up to a few years ago.

Alice: What do you think caused it to change?

Mary: Ah, different people, I think. The person who was doing the yearbook at that time, did the spook house.

Alice: So, nobody else has picked up the…

Mary: Right.



The Piano. A baby grand piano in the media center was donated to the school by one of the churches in the community. This piano has been played at graduations of the past before this area was designated as a media center. Members of the community volunteered time practiced and perform Christmas carols around this piano. One of many Christmas community/school traditions at Woody Gap School.

Alice: I didn't even know that this piano was in there? I never noticed it! What's wrong with me? I'm supposed to be an observer!

Mary: Well, it's piled up with so much junk! It's a beautiful piano.

Alice: I know. I hope it will be used in graduation.

Mary: It's gorgeous. It was a donation from the community, a church. And it's a beautiful piano. It does take up quite a bit of room, but, you know, it's…it has been played at graduations. We've had people from the community come in and sing Christmas carols with the students, work with them at Christmas time, and then, all go in to the auditorium and ring around the piano and sing Christmas carols. It was like a big family.

Mary looks upon the history of the school and its community with a fond eye. During my stay, I observed Mary taking her students out into the community to interview elders about their past and to photograph them in their homes. She keeps a stack of local accounts, documents, and collected artifacts stored in her room. Often, I would observe Mary's students at work in the library researching for Old-Fashion Day presentations or in-class projects focused on the community and its history. During the many conversations we had while I was visiting Woody Gap, Mary frequently emphasized how important she felt it was for students, teachers, administrators and members living in the community to have an intimate knowledge of what had gone on there before them, to understand and to appreciate their heritage. It was clear that she believed the past had something to teach her students and other members of the school and community.

Theme: School as a Tool for Preserving Heritage in the Community. Several of Mary's photographs were concerned with places found in and around the school setting that are, at least for her, icons of the school's history. She sees the school as a teaching tool for her students and other members of the community; a tool that keeps local history alive. The school is a reminder to the community that many of its members share a common culture.

Mary has a strong interest in the architectural significance of the school building. Currently, she is working with others in the school and the community to get the school on the National Register of Historic Places.

This corner shows the corner with the old stove flue. This shows the character of the days gone by when teachers had to build fires. It also, reminds community/school members of their heritage. Some community members remember the legend of the "Shot Gun Room."

Mary: The shotgun room is where the two front offices are now. And the shotgun room, a former student put shotgun shells in the heater (both laugh).

Alice: He did not!

Mary: Um hmm.

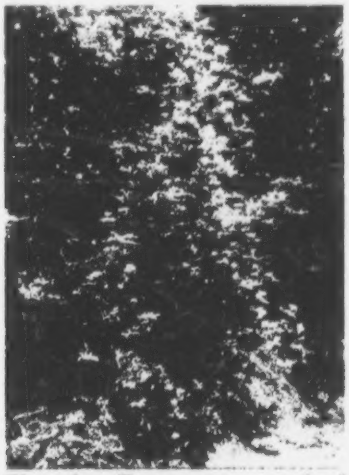
Alice: And what happened?

Mary: Well, you know, everybody was just scared out of their wits, because all of these shotgun shells kept popping off in the heater.

Alice: (Laughs.) So, now, that was nice when the architect came, he said they were going to keep the flues in there.

Mary: Um hmm.

Mary includes the school grounds in her thinking about opportunities available for school and community to learn about school history and local heritage.



The state flower, The Cherokee Rose, grows at the back of the school. This is part of our heritage. A class decided to plant these to leave for us to enjoy.

Mary: Somebody [who] taught school here for 32 years, she's deceased now, but she would tell me about the kids planting the shrubs and all around the buildings. It's been 15 years ago, I guess, maybe longer than that, because I've been here 13. I guess it's been 17, 18, or maybe even 20. But they are the ones that put the snowball bushes out and all of the greenery that you see around the school. That was a project back then.

Mary is appreciative of the past efforts of the students who have left behind contributions from which the school and the community may benefit. She also appreciates other contributions made to the school through athletics and to the community through military service.

Displayed in this trophy case are memorabilia from days past. There are generations of achievements documented here.

> Alice: And you know, I have never really looked at the showcase, the trophy case.
>
> Mary: We also have a register that we are getting redone, reframed of former student lists of those who have died in the wars, have lost their lives fighting. [One of our teachers] is talking about doing that as a Student Council project. We are going to see about getting it reframed and hung back in the hallway. It's been there for years; it's a list of all the people who have given their lives. So, that reflects the patriotism of this area and pride.

Mary has observed and represented aspects of the school that are of historical significance to her and, she feels, to the community. By promoting the school as a tool for teaching the students in the school, she endeavors to preserve its past and to connect the school with the community.

Question 1: Conceptualizing the Relationship Between School and Community

Theme: Outsiders and Rules for Conduct. Mary explained that a sense of community and what has gone on before the present can help new students better acclimate to the community. She also acknowledged that being of birth in the community is an advantage, not of privilege, but of being privy to knowledge that provides a context for the community's social structures and their navigation.

> Alice: I noticed that you talked a little bit about heritage and people being aware of their heritage. I mean, do you think that it's difficult for children to come in to the school and become acclimated to the area or what the tension is between being an insider and being an outsider?
>
> Mary: I don't really think that there is that much to do with it. Of course, if you are born here, you're a native. And if you have families that have been here for three, four, five generations, you know there's just a difference in that part, But as far as the students, no, I think people pretty much take them for their attitudes and how they are, how they present themselves. There are a lot of people who come in who fit well, because they are not disillusioned. A lot of people can't fit in well when they get here, because they can't go to the store everyday or they can't have, you know, pet care. Or they don't know how to deal with a possum on their back porch. You know?
>
> Alice: Yeah, so it's more of a cultural kind of difference?
>
> Mary: I know that one day, I was in the country store and this lady comes in. Oh, she's just in a big tizzy. She had to have some apples; she needed some apples. There just should have been some older gentleman sitting on the side of the road, with overalls on, to sell her some apples. And I thought she really wanted to buy some apples. Because in this region, you think in terms of bushels when you go to buy apples, because you don't run to the store every day. So I said, "Well, lady," I'm trying to tell her where this gentleman was on the side of the road that had apples that she could purchase. Finally, when it was all said and done, she said, "Oh, I just want a few for supper to make one pie." And I looked at her, and I said, "Lady, I guess you'll have to do like we do in Suches. If you can't find a squirrel to shoot for supper, you just shoot a possum!" (both laugh)
>
> Alice: That's a very interesting point.

> Mary: So, they want to come here, but they want all of the conveniences. Those are the people that have problems adjusting, and then they want to come in here and try to change everything, and make this into a town. They want to make our animals into zoo creatures, when these are animals that are in the wild and destroy crops, you know? But, they've never gone out and cultivated fields, and planted corn, and spent several thousand dollars for these sweet little critters to come in to eat. They think that that's all fun and games. So, there's some people who come in here with realistic attitudes, and they fit well. People who have fairy tales and fantasies, they don't.

Mary's Vision for the Future of the Relationship Between School and Community

Mary feels that community participation in the school could be stronger. She sees the creation of a new media center, one that is accessible to the community as well as the school, and the reclamation of the old auditorium as important means for increasing that participation.

> I think [participation] would be more if we had more ways of reaching out; if we could get a community media center that could be multiple use for school and community.... With our location here, we really need that. And I think it would be a very good community school relation type thing... that's the dream--the goal, long-term.

Towards the end of our interview, I asked Mary what photograph she would create if she could have gotten to it. She chose to speak about photographing the empty stage in the auditorium (empty because of impending school renovations), returning to her vision for Woody Gap and her view of the importance of heritage. With her knowledge of what has gone on before, Mary longs for a return to a school arrangement where the auditorium is once again the center of school and community activity.

Alice: Any photographs that you didn't get to take that you wished you had?

Mary: Oh, I probably could come up with another roll…

Alice: Any ideas that have come up to you, that if you could take a mental picture, you would add to this group?

Mary: Well, I didn't get a picture of the empty stage, the stage in the auditorium.

Alice: Why would you take a picture of an empty stage?

Mary: Well, to show that is the place where all the community performed plays, the original performance in the community by the Grand Ol' Opry stars, the entertainment, the cake walks. Somewhere in the archives, there is a picture of Ranger Arthur Woody standing on the stage with a cake in his hand for a cakewalk. There were box suppers; there were sweetheart balls. When my son went to school here, there were little plays. They even had movie reels here, at one time. The community could come in and see movies before the days of television. You know, this was the movie theater, I guess you could say! There is so much history. There are entertainers who have performed on the stage, nationally known—Kitty Wells, Red Foley. The local radio station, which was Gainesville, Georgia at that time would come through with the country music entertainers in the fifties, and they would perform. Um, bluegrass people performed on that stage. I can just vaguely remember. I don't know if they were fundraising a project, but there was community involvement in projects at that time. There are people who are deceased that performed in these groups; they are gone.

Alice: So what do you think, now that the stage is not available...

Mary: That is one thing the community wants. That is the vision--to get the media center a new location so that [the auditorium] can be opened up for the community participation again, community involvement, for plays, for get-togethers.

Alice: Do you think the community participation has changed or has it diminished since the auditorium...

Mary: Yeah, we don't have the same program. We don't have the plays, well, the little pavilion down on the ball field replaced some of it for music, for the outdoor. But, the wintertime, you know, music and stuff could be performed in there. There could be plays; there could be a lot of things. The heritage and history of this school is this auditorium because that's where everything was.

This picture represents an empty room. If the Woody Gap School were not in Suches the community would die. It's hard to separate the community from the school because of the close knit relationship of place and people. The community members are fully committed to keeping this place. Woody Gap School is the community and the community is Woody Gap School. Generations of families have gone to school here. Students feel a kinship to the spirit that lives on here. After graduation, they remember their time and place with fond memories for many years.

Mary longs for place where community members can once again get together, to participate in activities and revive traditions and events she holds to be vital for sustaining and enriching community and school experiences. While the auditorium is an important symbol for Mary because it is a link to pastimes that were wholesome and inclusive of all who wanted to participate, the notion of a new media center is a symbol of the future, a possibility for new school and community interactions. A media center may accommodate the school's and community's needs for technology and continuing education and allow the school and community to reclaim a part of its social structure that will build stronger and more vibrant bonds between its members and agencies.

Hank

Hank has lived in Suches and taught at Woody Gap School for 14 years. An active member in the school and the community, he balances his time between his family, professional activities, and community service and functions. His son attends Woody Gap and his wife, a former teacher at the school, is a regular volunteer. He conceptualizes a relationship between school and community that involves the support of families, his own, for example, community members, and students, many of whom are life-time friends.

Question 1: Conceptualizing the Relationship Between School and Community

Theme: Kinship Connections. Hank recently accompanied members from the school, local community, and his family on an outing that was an educational opportunity for his son. This event is an illustration representative of Hank's discussion on the relationship between his family and the local school and community. Hank introduces himself and his family by describing their participation in this community outing.

Folks on the ["Walkie-Talkie"] ***walk, resting at lunch,*** *doing the walkie-talkie trademark, talking.*

> The Walkie-Talkies is a group of local folks who walk and talk. They visit historic sites in the community and try to uncover relationships between the families and the housesites and the trails and kind of the way it used to be. Um, we invite local historians to go along on the hikes to give kind of first hand knowledge of the sites or the trails or things like that; that's the Walkie-Talkies. They are comprised of mainly…um, I guess most of them are retired. But, my family and children go along, and there's a wide range of folks and ages. I would like to think that more and more students [will] go. If I had a person in the picture, it would be maybe my son, a person from the school, because he learns something, this particular trip from [a volunteer who] is a retired Forest Ranger, so that kind of embodies this community-school relationship.

Question 2: School and Community Interactions

Theme: Community Support of School. Although Hank is not native born to Suches, he has lived in the area for quite a few years. He is a keen observer of local politics and has a highly sensitive social antenna when it comes to negotiating and obtaining needed resources for the school and his classes. His students and peers routinely kid Hank on his acumen for "making a buck" to fund school projects. He considers the community's role in providing resources for the school as an important component of the school-community relationship. It is his hope that with outside help from the community, he will be able to create a curriculum that is academically challenging and stimulating for his students.

The kiln in the basement. With community help (which has already been offered) students could make items to sell at the Indian Summer Festival while learning the art of pottery. I hope to initiate this project.

This one is in the basement, the bowels of the school. I've taken a photograph of this old kiln that I've been trying to get going for a few years. And, uh, we rewired it last year…two years ago. It's in working order, I believe. We've had two community people that would be willing to come in and teach pottery, maybe in the local studies class. I've been trying to weave in into either my chemistry or physics class for a few years. Um, we got permission from the Sports Club to use the barbecue pavilion to make, you know, throw pots and to let them dry. And also, to put this thing in the barbecue booth. I even got it wired up down there. So, it's just a matter of time, and it will happen. And the practical side of it is that the pots and stuff that they make, we will be able to sell at the Indian Summer Festival. The kids would be able to have some hands-on art, which they really lack here. And also the community input, that these two artists would be happy to come one day a week or we could even go visit their studios.

Alice: Are these artists that make a living throwing pots?

Hank: Yes.

Alice: Oh, that will be good for them to see that people can earn a living…

Hank: Right, right, oh, I think it would be great! We've even…just last week, somebody was going to donate a wheel, a kickwheel. Um, just a project that I think that could help a lot with the needs of the students.

Hank values his neighbors' skills and talents as resources for the school. As a teacher, he recognizes ways that community volunteer efforts and offers of expertise to the school benefit student learning.

On a walk with the ***Walkie-Talkies. This group helps each other*** *with not only trail walks in the area (as shown),* ***but walks to historical sites*** *in the community often with an* ***elder community member recounting history*** *of the area. This picture includes [a community member] who volunteers with reading in the school.*

Hank: The reason why I took is [this photograph is because] it had B—in there, who is a volunteer with the reading in the elementary. And, um, that just symbolizes the volunteer effort of the community coming into the school. Another person in the photo is her husband, and, he has more than once volunteered to make things out of basketry. So, he has volunteered to do that with the kids, and I think that would be a good thing for a local studies class or an elementary art program or…but, anyway, two people from the community who are willing to do volunteer work here.

[A community volunteer] helping with reading.

> Number twelve is.....[a community volunteer] coming and helping...what she does is not so much read, is that she lets other folks read. And, she being a retired librarian, um, the kids like it. She picks out the grade, and either she focuses on that grade all year, or she changes from grade to grade and just listens to folks read. I think mainly she's been targeting the fourth and fifth grades. We have several [volunteers], generally one to two people each year, come in regularly to listen or to read. They come down and volunteer. And he or she probably says, "This is what I have done in the past" or "I'd love to do that." That's about the extent of it. They don't always go into the classroom. They always...as a matter of fact, most of the volunteers are not in the classroom; they are in the library. Teachers will send students there. Um, I've brought parents in before, into larger classes, to help in the classroom. I thought that was really positive.

There are other volunteer efforts that demonstrate community support for the school, and although they may not be as evident during the school day, they are important for assisting the school in providing for its students. Some of these efforts require a great deal of the community's time, money, and effort.

Dedication of the new playground, funded by the Indian Summer Festival.

Alright, the next one is the dedication of the playground equipment. I think [my daughter] took this one while she was on my back. Um, [the principal] formally invited some community members here, as well as the school, to formally dedicate the new playground. We've been needing some new equipment for a few years and it was donated by the Sports Club, from the Indian Summer Festival. The moneys they have for the Festival held in the first week in October raises, oh, I don't know, probably six to ten thousand dollars a year. And that essentially supplements our administration funds. Um, this was about three thousand dollars for the playground equipment and it all came from the Sports Club. So, the Sports Club will be giving 450 dollars to every graduating senior this Saturday night. So, that's…they have to use it toward education…

Alice: Can they go to vo-tech or buy books with it?

Hank: Yes, they can buy books. They have to fill out an application…it will even pay mileage back and forth, a limited amount of dress, mainly for uniforms. It can be used for books, supplies…it's been used to buy wrenches to ball point pens.

Alice: Did the Sports Club work with the school to come up with that policy or did…

Hank: It evolved together. So, it hasn't changed. It was started, oh, say, around 20 years ago, a little bit less than 20 years ago with this function in mind—to help

> the school and it's been doing the same thing—all proceeds go to the school. It keeps just a little bit to help keep it going, for overhead.

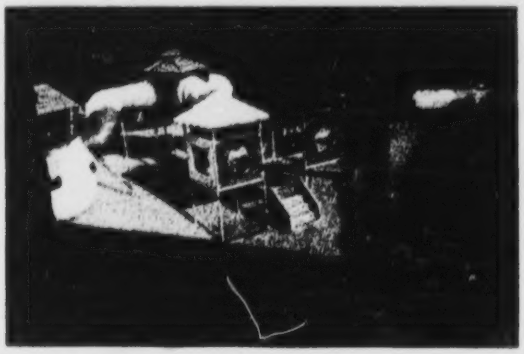
Hank describes ways in which he sees the community supporting Woody Gap School. Through the Indian Summer Festival, the school and the community work together to raise and provide financial scholarships for its graduating seniors and to fill a need of the school's by supplying the funds for new playground equipment, equipment installed by community members.

In addition to providing economic support, community members endorse the importance of the school through participation in social activities. For example, community members regularly attend the school's annual Awards Banquet and Baccalaureate.

The high school awards ceremony with community members attending.

> And, um, number 15, again, a group of community members, all community members.
>
> Alice: Such a quiet group, I mean everyone was so mellow, you know? Everybody just talked quietly, no kids running and screaming.
>
> Alice: Well, are there any pictures that you didn't take, that you wished you had?
>
> Hank: Yeah, I wish that I had taken pictures of the Baccalaureate. I think that's pretty big. That's all community people coming in.

Although local members of the community who are involved in school-related issues usually have similar goals for supporting the school, they are not always in sync with each other philosophically. Hank described community efforts to get the playground for the school and the tensions that resulted as members negotiate the community's values system while attempting to lend support to the school.



The playground funded by community support.

This is a picture of the playground equipment that was donated. And so, it's sort of not fitting. There was a big debate in the community when this was put up...when it was allocated...it kind of got ramrodded through the Indian Summer Festival by a member who's really instrumental in the Summer Festival, but actually not a member.

Alice: What do you mean not a member? Not a community member?

Hank: Yes, he is very much a community member, as a matter of fact, helped start the whole thing and is very instrumental in the Summer Festival, but he's not a paying member. It cost a dollar or two to join. He's just never has joined.

Alice: A paying member of...

Hank: The Indian Summer Festival.

Alice: Oh, okay.

Hank: So, he came in at the... I think we were all having dinner at a local restaurant to kind of commemorate our efforts at this year's Indian Summer Festival and our success, and we kind of heard round that L—was going to come and speak to us about something. Um, he showed up for the dinner and he proposed that we should spend three thousand dollars—well, it's a donation, but we'd have to pay three thousand dollars just for the transportation and the labor of putting the materials up. And, it just got railroaded right through. And a lot of us were just kind of stunned that in the course of twenty minutes we had spent three thousand dollars on something that we didn't really... you know, had voted on... hadn't thought about. In the community, such proposals are usually thought about for a long time, debated back and forth, before we start spending large amounts of money.

Alice: Why do you think that is?

Hank: Well, I just think that we're real cautious. Three thousand dollars is a lot of money for this community. After all, the school budget's less than six thousand dollars.

According to Hank, the Indian Summer Festival committee members are careful and deliberate in their decisions. These members of the community recognize the economic needs of the school and while working to assure sustained levels of capital for its support, they have developed a procedure of prudence. In this instance the procedure was challenged, and Hank wonders about the results, whether they had done the right thing in purchasing this particular playground set.

Hank's examples of community support he uses to illustrate the relationship between the school and community describe a community that is regularly involved with the school on different levels and in different capacities. Hank seems to appreciate the community as a resource and as an extension of the school.

Question 1: Conceptualizing the Relationship Between School and Community

Theme: Expectations of the Community. As a teacher, Hank has found that, sometimes, local involvement requires him to deal with expectations that differ from state curriculum standards and his own teaching philosophy. These expectations may affect the community's relationship with the school.

> Alice: Have you ever had problems [around religion and teaching evolution] here?
>
> Hank: Yes, I have. I've had community members get in contact with the administration. And, I've had the administration call me into the office and say, you know, "What is this? What do you do? Just tell me what you do?" So, I tell them that I do what my job tells me to do and that is to teach the origin of life from the evolution point of view, and nothing else. I've tried to make the issues mutually exclusive. And, um, tell students right up front, I am not a theologian. That's not my…I can…of the two questions humans ask: How did we get here? And where are we going after we die? I can address only the first, that is, how we got here. And from what I've trained to do, what the world thinks is right, and the state does, too. They hire me to do this. Now, I don't even address the other one, where do we go after we die, because that's out of my realm of expertise. I do address the former from an academic point of view. And students call me Monkey Man.

Hank is aware that his professional practices and philosophy may sometimes be in opposition with some community parents and students. And, although he continues to feel conflicted about this particular issue, he has reasoned out a position for himself that he finds is in keeping with his work as a teacher in the classroom and a member of the community.

Theme: Outsiders and Rules for Conduct. As an active member in his community for a number of years, Hank has had many opportunities to demonstrate his values as a community member, a teacher, and a family man with children. Yet, after residing in the area for over 14 years and working closely with the community's children, he still considers himself to be somewhat of an outsider. We talked about this as we discussed school awards.

> Hank: Generally, the outsiders will come in and say, and I'm included, would say that "If you give an award to everybody—like the Sports Club, they give an award to everybody—they become really meaningless."
>
> Alice: Now, you say you are an outsider? You call yourself an "outsider"?
>
> Hank: Well, I don't know. I would still consider myself an outsider, because I wasn't born and raised here. I don't have family here. But the community has been—this is a very forgiving community, a very accepting community, so, when I came here... because I was associated with the school, I had a "clean" slate. And, so, you can only add to that slate, positively, or you could, you know, throw some negative stuff up there.
>
> Alice: That's interesting...
>
> Hank: And enough negative stuff, and they'll run you out of here. The community, I think, is very representative of small town communities, in that they can rally and run folks out of here. I've seen students run out of here. I've seen teachers run out here. I've seen administrators run right out of here in the course of two or three years. And, they can make your life so miserable... you'll... you'll... you'll... why stay? I just reminded our present administrator the reason why our past administrator left is because the local board member didn't vote for her...
>
> Alice: She told me that herself. But, does that keep you from taking certain actions or taking certain stands or doing certain things because you are aware of

> that ostracism or that, you know, that ability for the community to decide that to exclude you?
>
> Hank: No, it doesn't. It seems to…either I've…and…um…I don't know. It seems…if…if you are honest about the whole thing. If you are fairly good with people, then everybody will side with you. You do your job, of course, and everybody sees that you are doing your job. I haven't had any problem with that in the community at all. I don't really fear the community.
>
> Alice: So, you feel comfortable that if you saw an injustice or something you felt…like ecological pollution, you could say what was on your mind.
>
> Hank: Yes. I think I could. I think that most folks would…and now that I have a little bit of clout here, folks would at least listen to my side, as opposed to lumping it as an outsider.

Hank's metaphor of a everyone having a "clean slate" in the community is an interesting one, his theory being that because the community is forgiving, each member of the community is given an opportunity to add positively or negatively to his or her slate. How one adds or subtracts from that slate may depend on how one demonstrates one's values to the community ("…everybody sees that you are doing your job"). Hank has identified what he thinks are criteria for adding positively to the slate ("…if you are honest about the whole thing. If you are fairly good with people, then everybody will side with you. You do your job, of course…"). As a result following this criteria, he has created enough clout in the community's eyes to avoid being a total "outsider" (…and now that I have a little bit of clout here, folks would at least listen to my side, as opposed to lumping it as an outsider").

During one of our conversations, Hank and I discussed the Academic Banquet, an upper school ceremony that involves the high school teachers and students. As we talked, the topic came up about a group of "outsider" students who attended Woody Gap School a few years back.

Students cooking for the high school awards ceremony.

Alice: [The Academic Banquet] really does have a family feel. It's like getting ready for the big family reunion picnic, to me.

Hank: It does. And, I thought it was so easy to get people to volunteer to set up the stage up and all this. So, as opposed to a lot of folks just causing problems, and maybe I am ignoring the fact that we have had that group of students here before.

Alice: You mean a group of students that causes problems?

Hank: Yeah, there were a lot of outsiders here, a lot the same age in the high school...

Alice: I've heard about that group.

Hank: And, um, they were just bent on being as counterproductive as they possibly could. And, you know, they mainly kept it to themselves. It just wasn't a real rewarding feeling like it is here.

Alice: So, do you think that those outsiders had come in with a different approach...I mean....so, do you think it's possible for new kids from the outside to come in and be accepted as a community member?

Hank: Easily. I think everybody, all the kids here, will accept a friend; that's just universal, over the 13, 14 years, is that they are really willing to accept any kind of folks.

Alice: What about a [particular type of] student? If a [particular type of] student came in?

Hank: I think...a...um...[that particular type] student...

Alice: Do you know of any [this particular type of] students who have gone here?

Hank: There haven't been any [that particular type of] students. We've had a [another particular type of student] or two. And we have even graduated someone who was at least half [another particular type], maybe three-fourths. Although, she wasn't living with a [the same particular type of] family. She was living with [another particular type of] relatives here. Um, which went over well. There was one family that was kind of different. They kind of ran them out of here. Now, a [particular type of student], it would be something different. But, I think it would be...I would love to see it. I would love to see what would happen. I really don't think it would be...it would depend on the family. If the family was a good family and everything, I think they would be accepted. A case in point, I have a hundred percent [particular type of] child, and someone could be just as racist to [this particular type of person] as they would be to [another particular type of person].

Alice: Don't you think that you legitimize your daughter's...

Hank: Yes that's the point I am trying to make. If...it depends on the family they come from.

Alice: But, I mean the fact that you're [a particular type]. Do you think that that probably legitimizes...legitimizes the fact that your daughter is accepted? Or am I reading too much into it?

Hank: Umm, I think it's because I've been accepted. Maybe I've been accepted because I'm [a particular type].

Alice: Or, not because you're [a particular type], but being [this particular type] is not counterproductive to being accepted.

Hank: I don't know. If you had a [particular type of] family that moved in, and they were integral, say in the fire department, and they were integral in some

> other—the churches—would their children be as accepted as, say, mine? Perhaps. I think that the people moving up here into the area, say, from Atlanta are wiser, and they are certainly less -- then some folks who have been here a long time.

School is one community stage where values are demonstrated and checked by others, where one can add to or subtract from one's slate. Even though it is with a "clean slate" in hand that community newcomers are initially welcomed and accepted into the community and new students can find acceptance among new friends, when the behavior of new students or community members does not reflect the values of the community, it is noted by its members and the pressure to conform may be so strong as to create a hostile environment, one in which, according to Hank, an outsider may be compelled to leave.

Theme: Kinship-Like Connections. When a new student or teacher enters Woody Gap School, s/he may find that because the school is so small, spanning across all grades, that strong bonds have been formed between its few members. Academic abilities or status does not limit friendships, as Hank notes as he describes some of his students.[2]

Friends of a feather stay together. These folks have different abilities, but still have classes together, still "run" together (hunt. fish. socialize). And learn from each other.

> Hank: This one here [of three students looking out the window]...this one I took because of it kind of represents rural school. It has three people of certain

---

[2] Three students looking out the window. The photograph has been blurred to protect the identity of the students.

> different abilities: one special ed. student, one pretty high achiever, if he wanted to be, and kind of a middle of the road guy. Good friends, have been in the same homeroom for a long time, for years and their tracks have kind of diverged, because of their abilities. But, they are still pretty close. The common denominators are hunting and fishing for this particular group....It's all through the whole notion of...people not trying to...of having a limited ability to change who they are by how they dress. There are no cliques as to how you dress. So people don't even pretend around here. It's completely broken down. Having taught at other schools...
>
> Alice: I've noticed that people don't wear very much jewelry or makeup or ...
>
> Hank: Nope, very little, designer stuff hardly at all. There is just no effort on that part, and I love it for that because the real person comes through, instead of having all these students coming through with all these guises, you know, day to day.
>
> Alice: That's a good word, "guises."
>
> Hank: So, it's great. I think you see a lot of genuine students here; they don't put all these facades on. So, um, that's three good guys.

Woody Gap School rests in a highly elevated valley, isolated from other communities. Students spend time in school within small groups of the same peers for years. Such small enrollments and constant exposure to each other may provide few opportunities for distinct group identities to form. Hank sees the "realness" of students coming through as a result of this arrangement.

Theme: Exclusivity. As students spend time together in such intimate settings as a small school and small community, shared communal values are fostered. Demonstrations of some of these shared values may signal to others a bond so strong that it may be exclusive of others. Hank provided an example of publicly demonstrated exclusivity. The demonstration earned the explicit approval of a community adult chaperone and his own verbal disapproval.

Alice: I was going to ask you: have you ever had a [particular type of] student that you know of, and, if you did…

Hank: No, we haven't had any [of that particular type of] students. As a matter of fact, the [baccalaureate] speaker this time was real proud to say, "Well, I know that all five…it's been told, reported, that all six of our graduates are [people of a particular faith]. And based on that, I'll dive into my sermon."

Alice: But, if one of them was [of a particular type], do you think that would be acknowledged or would there be some kind of retribution?

Hank: I don't know. It depends on the group of kids. Probably not by the adults, but there might be by the kids. Having coached one year and gone to [play] a [particular faith] school. I remember our students on the way out…and we got beat… but, I remember some of our students singing Onward, Christian Soldiers as they were leaving the dressing room. And, what was amazing was I was telling the kids that this is unheard of and they should stop, but it was condoned by an adult chaperone, a minister's wife, who just smiled about the whole thing and just thought that it was, you know, appropriate.

Hank is disturbed by the explicit behavior of some of his students while in a setting outside of their community, and disturbed that a community member sanctioned this behavior. While disturbed by these past manifestations of such insular perspectives, Hank is encouraged by a change in the community that may serve to dispel such attitudes.

> I think that the people moving up here into the area, say, from Atlanta are wiser, and they are certainly less prejudiced then the folks who have been here a long time. So, we are in a big transition period, which is probably not going to stop.

In addition to being excluded by the group that shares a common bond, some members of the school and community may feel that the isolation of the school and community settings creates fewer opportunities for members to interact with others. So some members feel that they are excluded from those who would be sources of support and provide dialogue. In light of this, another change Hank sees as having a positive impact on the school level is an influx of male high school teachers into the classrooms. This recent change is providing Hank with what he sees as a group of associates to whom he can turn as he examines his roles as a teacher and community member. We talked about how this change has relieved the feelings of isolation that he has experienced during his tenure at the school.

> Alice: Umm, to me, it's interesting, because, being a rural educator, I was in school settings where there was a lot of sexism; there was a lot of… you know… men just kind of glazed over when women tried to express themselves. I don't feel that here. I've really been amazed at the…um…warmth from males here, do you know what I mean, as accepting. There isn't that machismo I was expecting to be here when I walked in and there were male high school teachers. Because, I can cause them to glaze over you know (both laugh). They roll their eyes and go, "Oh, man, she's a feminist." But I haven't experienced it here.
>
> Hank: Well, you know, if you look…first of all, you have to put things in perspective here. The males in the high school have only gotten here recently, because it's mainly been a female-dominated work force, K-12. I remember one year where me and the principal were the only males on the campus.
>
> Alice: Wow.
>
> Hank: I mean, for one year it was like that. So, there's been a sudden change in the number of males here, and we've got some good males, real good people. A lot of male bonding goes on, say, at the lunch table (both laugh). What it boils down to, is that we have some real good people, and, we've been lucky to have the folks that we do. It's certainly kept me here, I think. That's one of the reasons why I stayed, I think.
>
> Alice: What's kept you here?
>
> Hank: The number of men coming in, and the types of those males. For a while there, I was lacking peers, at all, to talk to.

Alice: So, do you think that that is part of the condition of being a small school—is that you're…you don't have a peer group?

Hank: Right. I don't have a department, so, no one to talk shop with, and so, uh, that's…you just have to do it yourself.

Theme: The Chair Brigade. When a student lives in Suches, s/he usually attends Woody Gap School from kindergarten through twelfth grade. The smallness of the school affords students of all grade levels opportunities to interact with each other regularly. But interactions across grade levels have decreased in the past few years as the school has reorganized. Hank reminisced about a past tradition that symbolizes the more frequent interactions among ages.

> Well, I kind of liked it the way it used to be. I can remember days where, the chair brigade, we used to have…the old wooden chairs that sat in the media center had to go down to high school graduation on the field. And we had this long chain of a hundred kids….And you would see someone as large as [a mature high schooler] hand a chair down to maybe [a very young student], and then, maybe [this young student] would hand it over to…it would just go on down, because they had to send a couple of hundred chairs down there. Even the wooden chairs are gone [now]. It was great.

Hank provided the example of the chair brigade to represent interactions he has observed across the grade levels before the schools within Woody Gap separated students into divisions of elementary, middle, and high schools.

On another occasion, I spoke with Hank about another teacher's thoughts. As a local, she wondered if more teachers were now living outside of the community and didn't relish climbing back up the mountain to attend after school events. This concerned her because she felt that by holding events during the day, instead of the evening, community attendance, especially attendance by those community members who didn't currently have any children of their own attending the school, was lower than when they were held at night. I asked Hank what he thought.

Alice: Well, one person mentioned the other day, just in passing, how they felt like that, um, less activities were being done at night than during the day because [so many] teachers work in Blairsville, and they don't want to stay around or come back at night. And she was worried that it provided less opportunities for the community to participate in school activities. Do you see that or have you noticed...

Hank: No, well, I have noticed a little bit of a change in that...the high school activities were in the evening when I first came here, ah, 13, 14 years ago.

Alice: What about, like, the Awards Banquet, has that always been during the school day?

Hank: ...No, the Awards Banquet for a long time was held in the evening, and it was only for the high school people. Since then we've kind of divvied it up and the elementary has its own awards, the middle school has its own awards banquet, and the high school. So once we started divvying it up, then there wasn't a need to have one big awards banquet, which was solely aimed at the high schoolers.

Alice: So, it takes the emphasis off of the high school? Do you think that the community is able to participate more or less or about the same?

Hank: Yeah, uh, I think that the community has been able to participate less since the Awards Banquet is held during the day. It was always held in the evening, and it was a big turnout, community-wise. More non-related people used to come out for the Awards Banquet. It was a long drawn-out thing, too; it lasted two or three hours, giving out awards.

Alice: Like the Academy Awards, huh?

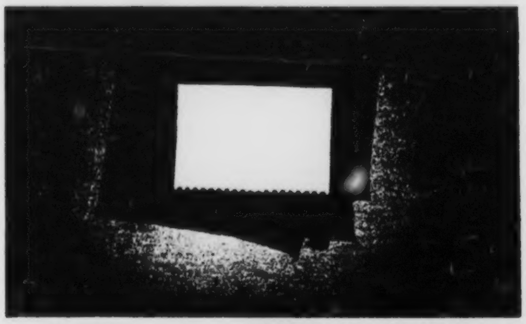
Hank: Yeah. It was a big deal. You had a lot more community people there. And in the last couple of years, we had these luncheons, which some people can't get off work; you know how it is. And, it's just centered on the high school. I don't know. It's probably one of these things that will probably go full circle.

> Alice: One thing this person was lamenting was that the little kids can't see what the big kids are doing, and the big kids aren't seeing what their brothers and sisters are doing, and for the parents, it's a strain. Which is common at a lot of schools. It's a strain to have to come for kids that go to different schools.
>
> Hank: I would probably agree. I would probably agree that in dividing it up, you have kind of reduced participation in the community. How to get around that [may be to] have high school, middle school graduation awards banquet the same day. That may make it even longer. Because before then, you see, they didn't have their own little separate awards day.
>
> Alice: It was just for the whole school…
>
> Hank: Yep, it was just for the whole school, and it centered on the whole school. So, at least now, the elementary and the middle school's individual students are being recognized.
>
> Alice: Right.

Even though Hank laments the change of the school's organization, he recognizes that there is a flip side to this reform that now stratifies students further into groupsts. He feels that within the smaller schools there is now a greater effort made to celebrate the individual student's accomplishments.

Hank's Vision for the Future of the Relationship Between School and Community

Throughout our conversations, his photographs, and photofeedback, Hank returned several times to his vision for Woody Gap School and the Suches Community. His vision revolves around a desire for a new school-community media center and the reclamation of the old auditorium as a multi-purpose space for the school and community.



A plan for the new media center modeled after the library in Murrayville. If built, it would serve the school as well as the community in life-long learning.

Okay, um, this third picture didn't turn out real well, but it's a picture of the proposed plan for the new library. And when we started the Annenberg grant, this was the focus of the Annenberg grant,…that is to get a new media center. I think the ulterior motive for that is to get the library out of the auditorium of the school. And since we will have our graduation in the auditorium for the first time in 16 years, I think, this coming Saturday, it…I heard the librarian, the present librarian, wondering if we'll ever get it back. If everything is removed out of the auditorium for the graduation, that there is a lot of strong feelings in the community about losing the auditorium to the library. Well, there is just cause. We would really like to have the auditorium back for community meetings, for plays. [The idea has] been going on for a long time. We thought we had it in the bag about two or three years ago when Guy Middleton, I think, had appropriated a half million dollars for a new library. It was modeled after a library constructed in Murrayville. So, if you go by there, you see that's a real similar thing. And it was going to be a library for adult education, too. So, it would be staffed by local volunteers in the evening. Um, they could do genealogy studies; they could do, you know, literacy training. I really think it would be good. I think it would be…sometimes, I wonder about all the money that would be spent for a little, small community up here, but, as I see it, there's going to be more and more retired folks coming up. And I don't think that the school is going anywhere, as long as we have our little special piece of legislation that's going to keep us funded. I think that we will stay put here. But, I think the interest…as people are drawn, more and more folks here will make use of it. So, I really think that this would be a really neat addition to the school, well worth a half million dollars.

On the stage looking out the front. ***This stage of the auditorium hasn't been used for community functions in 16 years. At graduation before it became the library.***

Alright, picture 10. It didn't turn out. The flash didn't go off again, but this was taken from the stage in the auditorium. And, although you have to kind of decipher that--it's now full of boxes and stuff for our removal of everything from the auditorium--I wanted to get a picture of the auditorium as it is from the stage. I think that the stage could be a real positive. There's been a lot of dramas here, locally. The state drama's one county over. And, it seems like early in my years, here, that there was this one play that was put on. And it was a success. And I think that it was good. I think it's been tried one time before, and it just fell through. I think that the play would be great. Because, number one, the play wouldn't be just high school or elementary. It would probably be, you know, across the board, all three. And it would also involve community members, because the teacher probably doesn't have time to do the whole thing.

Alice: You might even have some community members acting the play.

Hank: That's right. So, I think that would be wonderful. I would really like to get the auditorium back. It was…I remember a big rally in the auditorium, several years back, probably ten years ago, about us getting it all back—"What do we have to do to get the auditorium back?" Well, of course, first we would have to get the media center there. So that...

Alice: That's an expensive venture.

Hank: Yes. So that really started to initiate a lot of other things. It planted the seed of how do we get the auditorium back and that was to build a new media center. And so, that's what sparked this whole Annenberg grant to build a media center, so Guy Middleton got up a proposal. And, we came real close.

Alice: So, graduation this Saturday may really rekindle the fire...

Hank: Well, I hope it does.

Alice: Because, you can already see the beautiful wood on the walls, now that the boxes are being taken off the shelves, and it's...

Hank: A point in fact is that the person here that was fitting windows, for our historic windows, trying to keep them kind of like they were. They were looking behind the wood on the stage in the back. And, they were saying, "Well, we'll have to sand this." And, we said, "No! No! No!" I mean all of the names and stuff like that is just priceless. If nothing else, what you want to do is shellac it....I think it would be great to have that.

Lighting for the stage where plays and performances could be held.

This next picture, 11, is the old lights that still exist in here. Yep, that would be great. I think it would be just wonderful. I would like to get involved here. I know a lot of community members who would like to spend their spare time to volunteer for this effort. Christmas, I mean, you could do just regular Christmas things.

When I asked Hank what mental pictures he would have taken if he could, he returned to the idea of reverting the media center back into the school auditorium and building a new media center. He describes the "photograph" that represents part of his vision for Woody Gap School.

I wish I had taken a better picture of the media center…if we get the auditorium back, that would be a place maybe to integrate arts.

Alice: So that's part of your vision of a better Woody Gap?

Hank: A better Woody Gap would be to…and also an invitation to invite more community input. We could have the media center for continuing education, and also, have students there to staff it. They could be the librarians. And pay them to man the place. I just think that would be a wonderful activity. It would just be a means, I think, it would also be a better means for communication. A good many years back, it's easy to see that, although we are a small community, there's no vehicle for communication. Where a larger community might have a newspaper, a media center would facilitate the communication between a lot of folks out there, either father or mothers of children who go here or retired folks, given the opportunity…they really don't realize what an impact that could have. And really don't realize the opportunities that the school presents to them to give, and a lot of them have a lot to give. It's the key to sustaining the school….Um, I think that if

> you had the media center here and you had a lot of community peoples coming in here, it would serve as a model, get written up more, and get a lot more [public relations] for it, and I think that the local system would bathe in that recognition that we're doing something different, and would probably support the funding for it, for keeping Woody Gap here. So, I think that it's real pertinent for keeping Woody Gap going is to get more community involved in the school.

In his vision for Woody Gap School, Hank is inclusive of school and community. The new media center would invite the public in to for research and continuing education, with students recruited as staff. Hank also sees the media center as a place where information between school and community is facilitated. The auditorium would provide a space for collaborative projects--between grades and between the community and school. As a community member who works and sends his children to the local school, Hank is eager to see these additions to the school manifest as settings where his family and community can connect more with the school and with its own members.

Ryan

Ryan has been a teacher at Woody Gap School for three years. He is married to a Suches native, and they are the parents of one preschool-age child. A relative newcomer to the area, Ryan frequently participates with his wife in community and school activities. He is an enthusiastic teacher who appears to have strong professional and personal concern for his students and their education.

Some of Ryan's discussion about school and community centered on his own personal turmoil as he tries to examine his own place in the community. Much of this conflict is difficult for him to openly express. The setting where this turmoil originates is intimate and some of Ryan's photographs and discussions are powerful, with important stories to tell and insights to share, but several are too telling--literally--and it would not take much detective work to surmise the main characters cast in these stories. So, to protect Ryan and other members of the school and community, I have elected to omit some data too risky for Ryan and those discussed. I have chosen instead, to allude to this data within some of the safer contexts of other discussions presented in this case. In addition, I have chosen to present some of his riskier photographs as photos "erased." These photographs are represented by empty text boxes with the phrase "photo erased" inserted, the content not being the point as much as the reflections and expressions they give rise to.

Ryan used his photographs and photofeedback to guide our discussion about the relationship between the school and its surrounding community. In his discussion, he presented his dilemma: he has great admiration for many of the community values that sustain the relationship between school and community, but as a new community member and teacher, he is frustrated by some community values and how they are played out in the school setting.

Question 1: Conceptualizing the Relationship Between School and Community

Theme: Involvement in the Community. As someone fairly new to the community yet intimately involved as a volunteer and a teacher of its children, Ryan used his photographs and photofeedback and our discussions to reflect on his perceptions of the relationship between his school and the community. Ryan has admiration for many of the community's values made explicit by its members as they are practiced and passed on to its younger generations and community newcomers. At the close of our last discussion, I asked Ryan if there were any photographs he wished he had taken for the study, and if so, what were they? One of the photographs Ryan chose to describe as a mental photograph was one of his grandfather-in-law's garden. This photograph represents for him the self-sufficiency and tenacity of many of the community's members. Ryan expressed his admiration for these traits as he puzzled out how they might influence other qualities ignored or valued by some of the community's members.

I wanted to show my wife's grandfather's garden. Because, um, so many of the members of the community has to cultivate their own crops and gardens. And, that's what they live on completely….it's just such a foreign thing to me….Going to the grocery store, you know, I could get my crop, get produce, whatever….And [here] they create their own, and they're so self-sufficient. They don't need anything. That's the key, I think, that I wanted to get across: the self-sufficiency, that they use the land to live, and they know so much about it. Just because it's been handed down from generation to generation—nothing's changed. You know, maybe they use mechanical types of things and devices, but the way things are done is the same way. And, ah, it's amazing. Just how efficient they are and how they won't waste anything. They are so conscious, as far as things that concern them, you know, like wasting. I guess that's strange because there's some things they won't waste, like food, you know, and things that they need, boy, they will not waste it.

Alice: Do you see that in your students at all? Anything come to mind?

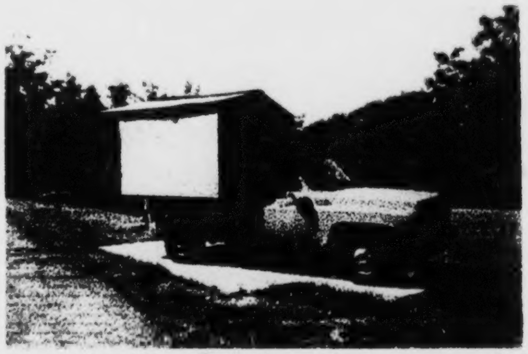
Ryan: Yeah, let's see….Yeah, they don't throw any thing away. My wife's like that, too, just a packrat. And, her mom's like that. Maybe, that stems from…down from that. They keep everything. And they need it…I've heard my wife say, "Well, you never know when you might need something." And, I'm, you know, if I haven't used it in six months, I'm probably not going to, and if I need it, I'll go to the store and get another one. And, my wife will tell me that I'm wasteful. But, it's so strange that I'm being attacked for being wasteful, and all these…so many people won't recycle. And, that's wasteful to me.

Alice: I also think about the recycling. I wonder if it's because the population is so sparse here they don't see the difference it would make. I wonder if they don't see, like in Atlanta where you might see thousands of cans, maybe they don't see that they would make a difference.

Ryan: Yeah, right, yeah: "What's the difference going to make with my few little cans?" I think that's a good point, because you just don't see the mass of cans.

Alice: Yeah, you see green trees and grass. You don't see the landfills we are supposed to be reducing.

Ryan appreciates the value the community puts on being economical and efficient with its resources, while expressing frustration with the lack of community awareness for recycling. Earlier, in the above passage, he mentions that from generation to generation "nothing's changed," and "the way things are done is the same way." This stability may allow members to pass on an appreciation for self-sufficiency and making do from one generation to another. Ryan provides an example of making-do in the school community.



We have done so much with so little for so long, we can do just about anything with nothing.

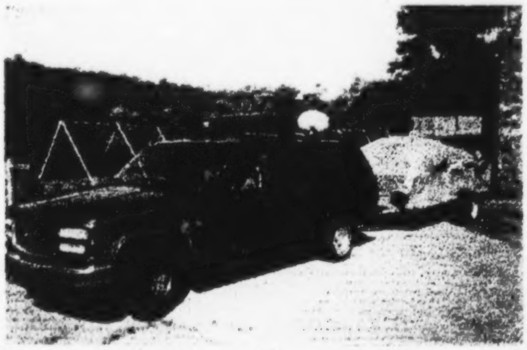
Ryan: This truck, this amazes me, picture number two.

Alice: I love that truck...

Ryan: It just, I don't know, it says, "Woody Gap," because, obviously, somebody's made this...it's a makeshift dumptruck. They just built that thing and stuck it on there. And, if you've ever had the pleasure of driving it, you're in for a

> treat (both laugh). It leaks exhaust, so whether you survive that trip, is also a minor miracle. But it's just a…it shows that how a lot of times you have to do things to get by. You know, we have to improvise and do with whatever we have. That truck's been here forever, and we just had to use it, you know. Um, because we don't have a lot of monies, you know, that big schools do. I mean, those schools don't have a lot, but we especially because we don't have the student size.
>
> Alice: Right, student size and school size—yep.
>
> Ryan: Yep. So, we just have to make do. Like my quote is: "We've done so much with so little for so long, we can do just about anything with nothing." [That truck's] a character. I drove it my first day. I remember backing it up to the window and just throwing stuff in it.

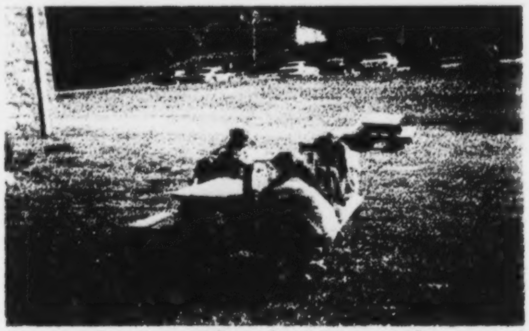
Ryan admires the school's pioneer spirit and commitment. He credits its spirit coming from the hard work of its members.



Teachers use their own vehicles to aid community in recycling efforts.

> Ryan: Okay. This picture I took just because…it reflects the community involvement. I think that's one of the things that impressed me the most, moving from a big city to the small community: it's that everybody here lends a helping hand. Um, here, there's got a trailer. One of the teachers is using his own vehicle to take recycling. In fact, I think the money goes to benefit the school…Anyway, I think, even though the whole community doesn't do it, I just think that that this is a good symbol of work, because, you know, there's so many things that need to

be done, and the community just lends a hand. And, I was just amazed by that. You don't see that in big cities.



Many community members sacrifice their personal time to help students with learning.

Number three is…it just reflects, um, more community involvement. They have come in and read with the kids, although this particular [student] is not particularly enthused about the…

Alice: Might be listening (both laugh), listening carefully…

Ryan: Yeah, maybe…but anyway, they do that frequently, and I think that's great. Essentially, I saw that, and said, "Oh, I need to go get my camera."

Ryan admires and appreciates the involvement of the community in school and local projects: he is also a participant in these activities.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." –Margaret Mead

The playground was [built] through volunteer donations. And, it's just one of those things, that, you know, that…I think I quoted Margaret Mead saying…,"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed people can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." That's a manifestation of it, right there. You know, [we] just don't have the money, and the funds aren't there. We've gotta do it some other way, be creative. So, that's one thing that I am really impressed with is how the community gets together when it needs to and…that's how the school was built. Um, the gym was built that way, through community effort. That stage down there on the field was community effort, donated materials and time, [and] all the decks at [the clinic]. Yeah, I even helped with some of that. I'm not a carpenter, but I did some of it…whatever I could. Yeah, so it's definitely a product of community lending their time and donating their goods.

Theme: Old Habits. While Ryan applauds the spirit and dedication of many the community's members, he is perplexed by some community members' lack of interest in protecting local resources. He theorizes that perhaps some local people take their surroundings for granted because that's all they have known. Ryan uses his outsider perspective to consider this.

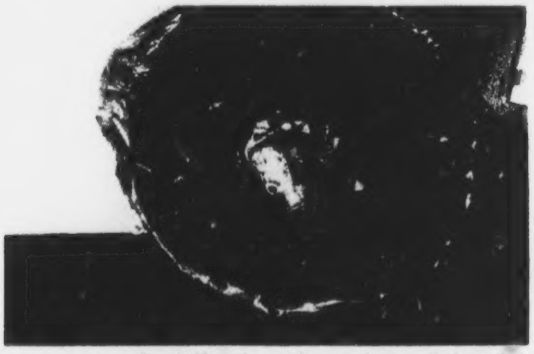
Without regulation or opportunity for disposal, abandoned vehicles are simply left for Mother Nature to handle.

Yeah. Let's see, this is picture number seven. This truck's been, you know, in one shape or another—I've seen it. And, it has the duct taped window. And, I see this a lot. You know, cars just abandoned, because…well, nobody is going to come and say, "You have to take this out of here." And, then, it's just left to Mother

Nature to take care of…it'll sit there, for, you know…I don't know how long. You see cars out in fields with grass growing through the engine.

Alice: Well, maybe people think of cars more like corpses, you know, dust to dust, just put it out there, and it'll go back to the earth.

Ryan: Yeah, seriously, and eventually it will, just not in my lifetime. And it's a shame. You know.



Recycling efforts are not only difficult with students, but adults too. Individuals, who have been surrounded by a seemingly infinite supply of resources, take for granted the need to recycle. Conversely, individuals who have lived in urban areas see Suches as an endangered species, and seek to preserve its beauty and resources.

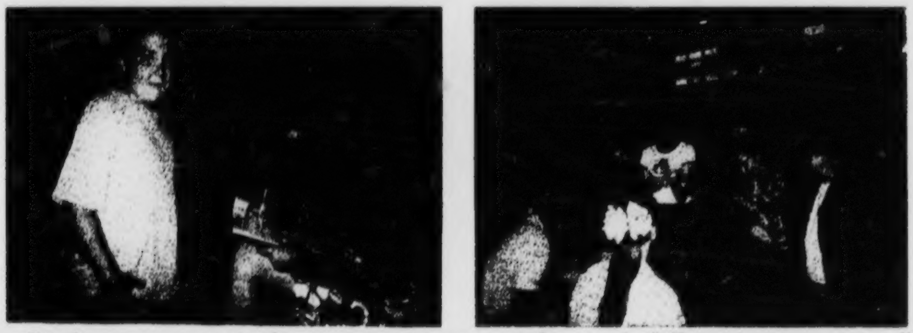
I staged that [photo] because, you know, I've seen it so many times.

Alice: Well, the second day I was here, [I saw you] pulling paper out of the trash, and going, "You need to recycle!" (laughs)

Ryan: And, it's so hard to get…and I think that it is just a habit…they've had all this around them for so long, they don't realize the importance of it. They don't realize the vanishing, you know, areas that are…because, they've never lived in a smog-infested, totally over-developed place.…You know, our population is getting bigger.…So, I think the people, who moved in out here, see the rare, you know…and that fact that this is something we need to be preserving.… I've made so many efforts. [Another teacher] and I have both tried to get the kids thinking that way. And, the kids are better really than the adults. It's the adults that are having a hard time, you know, changing their thinking.…I can't even throw

> anything away. I've got my wife throwing everything into recycling….New habits just aren't easily formed.

Theme: Kinship-Like Connections. Ryan has lived in the Suches community for three years. He is a participant in local activities, married to a community native, and a teacher in the local school. As a teacher, he has had an opportunity to observe and consider what it means for children of all ages from the same community to attend the same school.



Students appreciate the opportunity to socialize with different age groups. The students feel like a family after being in the same school for 12 years.

> This reflects the dynamics between younger and old kids. I mean, K-12 kids, they develop this sense of kinship, I think, from when they are together in elementary all the way to when they are in high school. You know, even though they don't eat lunch together, they still have interaction, and I think that they develop friendships from that. And, here we have a sixth grader having a yearbook signed by a twelfth grader….you can tell, he's pretty happy, pretty proud….fifth and sixth grade there, and middle school and high school. And, that was neat. It was almost as if it just happens automatically, that yearbook signing thing, because we never really say, "Okay, it's official yearbook signing." They just automatically…it's one of those things that happen.
>
> …And they don't fight. I have never seen, well…little guys, I've seen get into spats…I've never seen a high schooler fight or a middle schooler, I mean… I don't know; I mean, I can't put my finger on why that is. It seem like…it almost lends itself to more fights, because, you know, brothers and sisters always

> fight….and maybe it's the communication, the openness to communicate that keeps them from getting to the point where they have to go to blows, you know. I'm sure they argue or whatever, and it never escalates to that point.

Theme: Outsiders and Rules for Conduct. Ryan appreciates the "sense of kinship" he has observed at the school. As a self-proclaimed outsider in the community endeavoring to understand how to be an insider, Ryan is trying to develop his own sense of kinship or belonging. As he learns the rules of his community, he sometimes finds himself grappling with particular aspects of the community's value system that appear to him to conflict with his own. This conflict sometimes reveals itself in the school setting. While not wishing to compromise his own values, Ryan struggles to find acceptable ways to make a difference in his community and his students' lives. He longs to help shift some of those community values he perceives as contrary, yet passed on to the community's young people. Ryan described how he struggles with this predicament as we discussed a particular curricular decision and action taken by a school employee, an action too sensitive to share here, an action that upset Ryan and left him feeling ill at ease.

Photo Erased

Some refuse to recognize the educational value in teaching others about individuals different from themselves.

> Alice: So…how do you feel about that [curricular decision and action]?
>
> Ryan: Oh, well, it infuriates me. You know, it is almost like this [the research study] was serendipity happening, because I've wanted…a way…this means for me to just express this feeling. I've felt like this happens, but now [the person's action] has just like provided the means for me to be able to [talk]. You know,

I've been wanting to express my feelings, somehow, some way, and then, all of a sudden this [action], and then you come here, and I can put the two together. You know, I can just fit…it was like it almost happened for a reason.

Alice: Symbolic, in a way.

Ryan: I am so, so frustrated.

Alice: So, do you think that the school sees this [curricular decision and action] as a way to protect kids?

Ryan: I think they see it as a way to protect…almost sheltering, you know.

Alice: Do you think that there is a fear?

Ryan: Yes, absolutely, there's a fear. Their only source of information…the only image they ever get of [a particular group] is from the media. You know, I tell my wife all the time, because she is afraid to death to put our son in school in Atlanta, I say, "You've got remember, when the people in the news puts things out, it's all about bad, and it just happens to be one subculture that they typically target….when they show all bad…you know, they don't ever show any good, because nobody would watch, probably. But…so, [community members] see that, and they watch sports. So, they think that they're thugs or athletes or drug dealers. So, it's a limited image….they equate the color with class and their culture, you know, and they are threatened by it.

Alice: Um hmm. Were you here when [students of a particular type] were here?

Ryan: Um hmm.

Alice: Were they treated differently?

Ryan: Nope.

Alice: Were they considered to be [another particular type]?

Ryan: I think so, and it's specifically…there's certain, um,…backgrounds that are more threatening than others.

Alice: Um hmm.

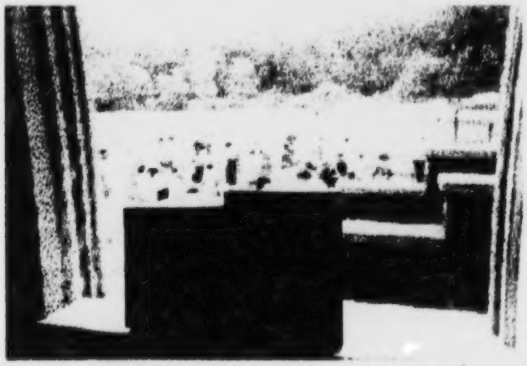
> Ryan: Certainly, [one type] is...and [another type] is probably next. But, we have a teacher who is married to [a particular type], you know. Alright, there may be people who are against it, but nobody thinks of it as, you know, as a [another type of] woman, a totally different story.
>
> Alice: Well, I noticed in the statistics about the school, the Report Card that was reported was 100 per cent White. But, if you want to get technical, it's not.
>
> Ryan: Right.
>
> Alice: So, that's kind of interesting....I look at that and think, now does that mean that they are so colorblind, that they are so accepting that, you know, they don't differentiate, or is it that as long as you can make it palatable enough that it feels like it is all one monoculture, then, no problem there.
>
> Ryan: That's what I believe. No, it's not a matter of tolerance at all. There's zero tolerance....Yeah, it's frustrating, very frustrating, and it makes me angry, makes me frustrated, um, makes me sad.

Embedded within Ryan's frustration with the manifestations of some of the school and community values he has witnessed is his realization that community members insist that he, as an "outsider," co-op particular stances and demonstrate his values in a way that is the least disruptive to the community's norms.

> I'm in this real precarious situation, because I'm from somewhere else. And, you often hear, "Oh, well, people often come in here and try to change this, that, and the other. And, why don't they just leave it the same." And, I know that I would be thrown in that same category: "Why do people come in here and try to change us? Why do people come in here..." I've heard it over and over and over....The only way that people will...I found out real fast that I had to come in here and say, "Well, that's the way it is, and that's the way it should be, and it shouldn't change." "Oh, well, you're okay, then." I remember one conversation specifically: I said something, I don't even think it was about race or anything, but it was about something, and they said, "Well, what do you think about that?" And, I said,

> "Well, that's the way I think it should be." "Oh, well, then you can stay here, then."....If I was to come in here and try to change something, whether it was their opinions, or be their traditions or...they are violated by that...Yeah, so, at that point, I just felt very...I knew I just had to be silenced by that, and my only means for communicating was here with the students. And, that's what I really wanted anyway. I wanted the students to...you know...so that we could stop the perpetuation of the cycle. You know, maybe if I could make a difference with the kids.

Theme: Exclusivity. As a community member, Ryan hopes that by adding his own values to the framework, the system will result in a more open and accepting shift. Though, at times, he still finds himself feeling alone and outside of the group.



My teaching philosophy often alienates me. I am left to hide in the shadows, apart from the whole, so that I may let students experience a taste of diversity. Why?? Am I doing anything wrong?

> This [photograph] reflects me, because I feel so alienated about what I am trying to do here. And, here's everybody in the entire school out here, and I'm left by myself in the shadow with all of these people in the sunshine, you know. I like the way that [picture] turned out. That really helped.
>
> Alice: It makes me wonder what kids...which kids out there might have some underlying discomfort or inner knowledge or inner turmoil that they aren't able to articulate because it's not part of...
>
> Ryan: It's not the status quo.

Alice: I mean, do students ever do that…say something is bothering them or articulate differences?

Ryan: Hmm, no, rarely. Plus, they don't have the…they don't have the…I don't know how to say it…the knowledge to do that either. Their exposure is so limited. They don't know….. They don't have that…those…I'm trying to put a word to it…the knowledge…that's the only word I can think of.

Part of Ryan's isolation may come from teaching in a small school without the benefit of a peer group with common interests.

Alice: Have you felt this way pretty much since you've been here?

Ryan: Yeah, and it wouldn't be so bad if I were, um, if I could even have somebody in my department, even another English teacher who was on the same, you know, plan, had the same teaching philosophy, same…but, you know, I'm the only one.

Alice: So, do you think that being small has left you in isolation?

Ryan: Absolutely, yes. Yeah, it's a disadvantage for me.

Ryan's Vision for the Future of the Relationship Between School and Community

As a teacher in the community's school, Ryan sees one of his roles in the classroom as a guide, one who can provide his students with a window to multiple perspectives and diverse settings. Ryan considers these "excursions" into other cultures as opportunities for his students to ponder their commonalities and their differences. It is his hope that his provision of models of tolerance will make a positive impact on his students' perspectives of others.

Alice: How do you think you would stop the cycle through the kids?

Ryan: Um…I'd just…um…I think one of the best ways to teach tolerance is to show tolerance myself. And, to expose them to a great deal of cultures through literature. You know, I have, like, this greatest ability of being able to show different cultures by showing them literature, you know, especially World Literature. And, in Spanish, too, being able to teach the language. If I can give the an appreciation of that language, maybe they will appreciate the people who speak it. And, then, the cultures from…it's like this looking glass, you know, that I have here. They don't have any experience other than what's here, so, I can use this looking glass by using my literatures to expose them to different cultures and people. Hopefully, that will build some tolerance.

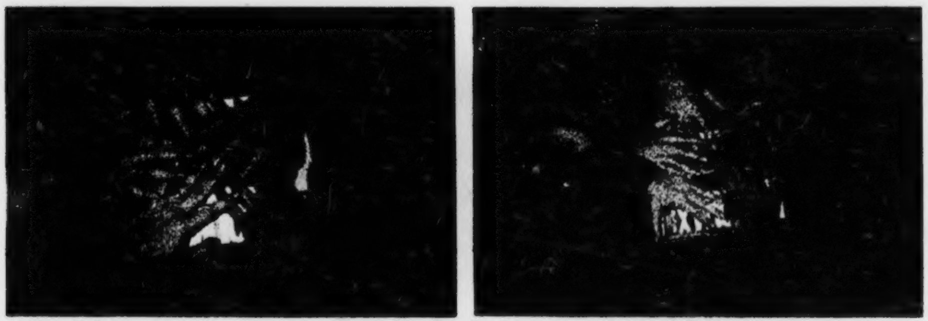
Alice: When you say looking glass, do you mean them looking at themselves?

Ryan: No, them looking at other cultures….Standing from afar…yeah, you know, we're isolated here, and this is the lens from which you can see these other cultures and really appreciate the difference, not only differences but see similarities. And, you know, I think that that's a big key when people say similarities in other people, that prejudice becomes just downhill…to say, "Hey, you know, there are people like that that are going through what you're going through," and they learn vicariously, you know.

Alice: Um hmm. It's like stereotyping. I think, sometimes—well, I know we do—I mean, my belief is that through stereotyping we diminish that multidimensional and complexity of humans, you know. It's easier to dismiss someone when we think of them as being shallow or stupid or ignorant or violent.

Ryan: Right. I try to always express my tolerance of differences, but not just that everybody is the same, but to celebrate differences: "Hey, that's okay for them to be different." And that's what's so cool about it, you know.

Ryan used a metaphor of a mirror when he described his wish for his students' to recognize and appreciate individual differences. This discussion led to Ryan's explanation of his vision for Woody Gap, such as curriculum changes that will increase and improve opportunities and skills for students in settings beyond Suches community.



Lack of diversity often prevents individuals from accepting differences in race, color, culture, or creed. A community who only looks in the mirror becomes blinded its own image, so that it fails to see anything of value, except that which is reflected in its own people. By only seeing ourselves, we often hide others. Failure to only recognize differences impedes our ability to see the similarities.

I just felt that…with all of us the same color, we are, like, masking this opportunity to see people of different backgrounds. Everybody has the same backgrounds; it's almost like they become blinded by their own self. And, it's…by not having the opportunity to see other people of different backgrounds, you are…

Alice: I think diversity is an abstract notion, if you are not in it.

Ryan: Absolutely.

Alice: I mean, it's so hard to explain to people how to be in a multicultural setting if you are not in it. It's almost a pointless exercise, in some ways. So, we have to challenge our students to think abstractly.

Ryan: And it's really hard for them.

Alice: What are some ways the school could do that? Since this does seem to be an important issue: I mean, if this was an ideal school, what are some things it could do? You mentioned curriculum.

Ryan: Yeah, and we've got to…and that's one thing—is exposure. I think just being able to expose people, but therein lies the problem of travel…being able to get there. They don't allow us to take trips that are beyond the course of the day.

Alice: Right, and if travel was an easy thing, you'd all be going to Blairsville.

out and dress up their little favorites. They're announced and the name of their parents and everything. And then, they go over and sit down on the bench. And then, when it's time for the crown, and the flowers, and the second-runner-up, they come and bring everything. It's really neat how it incorporates the whole school. And then, the high school has a representative from each grade. It's really neat. And, I put in here, how this year the varsity girls' game was cancelled by the other team. They just called up and said, "We just can't do it." And so, Mr. – asked me on the Tuesday before the next Friday, it was almost two weeks, he says, "Is there any way you think that you can get a team together to play with our girls?" I think that there ended up being ten or twelve of us alumni, women from the ages of…let's see the youngest was probably my sister who is twenty-one all the way up to probably forty-five, maybe closer to fifty. So, anyway, we all got together and played. What's funny is one of the little senior girl's mom and her aunt was on the team. And you know, it was fun! And we played…what my sister said was…my sister was so funny…she said, "How many people…" because she played basketball, too… "how many people get the opportunity to go back to high school at Homecoming and play basketball?" (laughs) And I said "Not many!"

Alice: Well, who won?

Charlie: Well, we don't need to talk about it…(laughs)

Alice: (laughs)

Charlie: Who won or who got killed? They won.

Alice: Well, it was their Homecoming.

Charlie: Yes, it was their Homecoming, and they were in much better shape than we were. I told Mr.--, "Next year, can you give us at least, you know, a month?" I think we had two practices. But, it was fun. So, anyway, that was a community and school involvement.

Unlike most schools, Woody Gap does not have enough students to have a football team--typically, there are around 20 or so students in the entire high school--so

Ryan: Right. So…

Alice: I wonder if virtual travel…

Ryan: I've tried that.

Alice: Oh yeah?

Ryan: In my World Lit class, I let them explore—that's one of the things they have to explore and find five interesting things, to them, about that culture. And so, that's some exposure there. I just give the freedom to explore whatever concept it is. They kept saying, "Do you want?" And, I would say, "No, no. It's not what I want. You've got to understand, it's what you want. What do you want to find out about that culture?" And they have a hard time with that too.

As Ryan endeavors to situate himself in his community, he finds that he is in conflict with some of the values displayed by some of its in the community and the school. Though the school and community are located in a rural place with neighbors few and far between, there times when Ryan must consider how he will display his own values to members of the community and his students. When his values are in direct opposition to those around him, he must weigh the consequences of his displays. Sometimes, he experiences feelings of isolation because of his perspectives. Other times, he holds great admiration for the community values of hard work and members' willingness to pitch in and help others. As a teacher, it is important to Ryan to find a way to broaden his students' scope of tolerance while modeling tolerance and acceptance himself.

Matt

Matt is a rising senior in a graduating class of five students. Unlike the other two students in this study, Matt has been in other school settings. He first attended Woody Gap School during his fourth and fifth grade years. Matt then returned after completing the sixth grade in a suburban school outside of Atlanta. His experiences provided him with additional perspective when talking about Woody Gap. I found Matt to be a bright and sensitive person with a keen awareness of his own vulnerabilities and strengths and a willingness to talk about what he perceives to be the relationship between school and community. His conception of the school and community relationship centered around discussions of historical connections to the community, rules of conduct, and school family.

Question 1: Conceptualizing the Relationship Between School and Community

Theme: Holding on to Heritage. Looking at school and community with a camera, Matt used a "lens" of an outsider returning to his ancestral roots in the community and a "lens" of one learning how to be an insider. Through these lenses, he talked about the importance of historical connections to the community.[3]

Matt was not born in Suches, but many of his family members were. During the years he has lived in the area, Matt has learned of the value the community and school places on local ancestry and historical connections to names and places.

> This is a picture of a rock with a plaque on it that says "W. Arthur Woody, Pioneer Conservationist." That was just to show one of things about this place is you know…a…is that there is so much history here. And that's just kinda like Arthur Woody is somewhat of a legend to Suches, you know? And it's kinda neat…uh…most places you don't really have some history to identify with where you live, but he is kind of a legend around here….because the Woody name is

---

[3] Matt chose not to respond to his photographs in writing.

kinda like in Old England, you know, where names were a big thing, your last name was, you know, was a huge part of who you were.

And that's also why I took the third picture, Cooper Gap Road. Cooper is just a huge name for areas around here. I assume it was a family name at one time.

Alice: …It's amazing to me how people can keep family trees around here straight. They know whose cousin to whom, married by, what niece is…related, but only by marriage. They keep all of the lineage straight.

Matt: Yeah, everyone here I'm related to, like, for instance, [other students in the school] are like second or third cousins or maybe, I forget how they are related, but I know that line because in 1838 or 34 somewhere in the 1830s, C—came from Kentucky and bought land in the Canada district which [Hwy] 180 and he had a son, M--. M—married and had six kids, one of which was J--. And, J— had D—and she married C—from Blairsville who had my grandmother. So that's my part of how I am here. That's something I hold on to, because that's how I can say this is my culture too. That's what ties me in….So, it's neat how you can see how everyone's related. I can do that with just about anyone in this school.

Alice: So, you said your relatives, your ancestors, helped tie you to the community. If you didn't have those ties, what other ways could you connect with the community, could you feel like you are a part of the community? Does going to the school help you feel like you are part of the community?

Matt: Not really. Well, maybe yeah, part of the community, but not part of the heritage. To be able to say, "This is my heritage."

Okay. The fourth picture is showing the whole last name thing again: "Tritt's Country Store." ... Tritt is a big name.

Alice: Yes, I've heard that name, I think connected to the White's and the Woody's.

Matt: Yes, this Tritt that owns the store before when it was open. That is, Linda White's parents. They are still alive. They are named Audrey and Howard. Howard is hilarious. He is a funny guy. He's crazy; he's a nut. You know, when we first moved here, we lived over by the store and it was still open, and I was fresh out of Roswell, fresh out of the suburbs, you know, when we moved here. Me and my brother, --, we were in fourth and fifth grade. We walked up to the store and our dog followed us, you know, and old Howard, he looked at us and he said, "That's a nice dog you got there. I'll tell you what, I'll trade you this flying possum for that dog." He had a possum that was...he had a taxidermist mount a possum, mess with it and put some wings on it and a rattlesnake's tail on it. And it was up on his wall and he told --, he said, "I'll trade you that flying possum for that dog." And —was going to do it. I had to tell him not to, but...

Alice: (laughing) He wanted to see how far he could get with you all.

Matt: Yeah, and then he…uh…then he said, "Hey, you wanna hear my world-famous turkey call?" And we were like, "Sure, sure." He picks up a safety pin and puts it to his mouth and says "Here, turkey, turkey, turkey."

Alice: (laughs)

Matt: So, that's just the type of guy he is.

Alice: You were a fresh audience.

Matt: Yeah. He's just funny. So anyways, that's Linda White's parents….Right there behind the store.

Matt shares his appreciation and awareness of the historical connections between families and places as he relates how he began his navigation into the unknown territory of this community. A keen observer and student, he attempts to contrast the changes the community has undergone with what he knows of the past.

Matt: This is a picture of the phone booth. It's just kind of a, you know, it's just showing the moving in of technology and stuff like that. Business and everything moving in. I mean, you know, we don't have cable or anything like that. Everyone uses a satellite or an antenna. It's still very uncommercialized, but it's going more and more that way. Actually, if you look back, people say Suches has grown, but

Suches ain't what it used to be. I mean it may be growing, but it ain't what it used to be. It used to have 220 students in 1941 when it opened, or 1940, whatever. See this store (pointing to picture)? There was Tritt store. There was also Burnett and Pierce,…they had Ken Carlisle's store, and they had Minnie's walk-in store… and we had a whole bunch of post offices up here. And there used to be a hotel up here. There was a skating rink; now it's an old folk's home. People used to come up from Dahlonega, I heard, to go skating there. See, Suches isn't what it used to be. The school isn't what it used to be.

Alice: Why do you think that is?

Matt: Back then they had Beta Club and everything, Drama Club. They had all kinds of stuff here. I don't know. We used to play the basketball teams just 10, 15 years ago. When — was in school he said they used to beat the county teams when he was in school. But we went down and the county schools grew.

Alice: Well, I know farming's not that big of deal anymore.

Matt: A lot of logging used to be big up here. I think, I think…. We went on a walk through Cooper Creek and we were on top of a ridge and –'s grandfather remembered when the whole ridge was corn, all corn.

Alice: Really? Well, I wonder…I remember — saying people used to be much more self-sufficient, years ago. You know, they did everything for themselves and didn't have to go off the mountain to get stuff. They had stores; so you could live up for months at a time in the mountains. And I don't think people feel that way anymore. Now, cars are too tempting to take you off to places.

Matt: It's much easier. I mean if you go down past Tritt's, down a ways, go to where there is a dirt road; it was the only way off to Dahlonega. You had to go with a wagon, with some Model T's. They talk about when they go, they cut a tree down and cut the top off and tie it to the back of the wagon, as a brake. So, it would drag behind the wagon to keep it from going faster.

Alice: I've never heard that. That's wild!

> Matt: Ms. — remembers when there were no paved roads up here. I think paved roads haven't been here…I don't think…there were paved roads when the school was built. That's an assumption.
>
> Alice: I know that when the school was built, the CCC was out paving a lot of roads…I wonder if it all happened at one time.

Matt has made a point of learning about the community in which he now lives and where his ancestors once lived before him. It may be that by valuing this information, Matt is aligning himself with those in the community and the school who also value local histories and genealogies. This knowledge may help him gain acceptance in the community and the school.

Theme: Outsiders and Rules for Conduct. As an outsider, Matt is aware of the difficulties a new student may encounter when first entering the community through the school.

> Alice: Well, one day we were out sitting and looking at your pictures and we were talking about kids who have come to school here and didn't last. I would love it if you would talk a little bit about that. Just for a few minutes talk about kids that it was hard for them here and hard for you here.
>
> Matt: Well, often, it wasn't that they didn't feel like that they fit in or whatever. Umm, to make life time friends up here, it's not that easy. It's kind of like a fad when a new person comes. One minute they're hated. The next minute they're all loved and then they are hated again.
>
> Alice: Why do you think that is?
>
> Matt: I don't really know….Well, it's exciting. You know, when you find out a new kid is coming to Woody Gap. You know, everyone is buzzing about it. It's something new, you know? And, most [new] people don't care for the way things are. It's like when you get into a new relationship, you don't act your true self. You know, once they get to know you, you're just another person. It's different; it's calm and slow again, I guess. That's what I have observed. And it's not the

same life, because it's, a lot of people would think, boring, because there's not always something to do or something going on, but that's just the relaxed life up here.

Matt has found that within the community, there is an appropriate way to conduct oneself, particularly in the company of its elders. There are rules for conduct that an outsider may need to learn if he or she is striving to be an insider. Matt explains how these rules differ from where he lived in the suburbs of Atlanta.

Alice: Well, so, what about a kid who comes in and is a good kid, doesn't get into trouble?

Matt: Like [my friend].

Alice: Oh, yes. I was really surprised to hear that he had been to 11 different schools. I don't know why, but I had just assumed that he had always been up here.

Matt: He's been here two years, really a year and a half, because this past semester he has been going to college in Tifton. He is a dear friend of mine. You know, he went camping with us after graduation.

Alice: Has the community accepted his family?

Matt: Yeah, pretty much. You know, that's the way it is. Well, up here, it's like people find fault in you too easily, and they hold grudges and everything else. It's something very different. Like, where I grew up, it's real laid back. That's something I had a hard time with is you don't say certain things up here, you know, and it's like, if you're not... I don't know... you've got to act a whole different way. Something it took me years to learn, and when I first would go to someone's house, people would be like, "Man, who is this guy? Who does he think he is?" You see, people up here are really good at acting one way in front of adults and acting another way behind their backs. And, the way I was brought up is keep it real all the time. But that's not the way it is up here. But if you are a person like [my friend] who doesn't do anything and keep it real in front of

> everyone—and you can, because your if real self is something everyone loves then –then it's easy.

Matt has identified three ways of "acting" as a member of the community: first, as he was first taught, being "real," meant one exposed warts and all to community members, even the elders. Second, as some local youth do, one can put on an act for the benefit of the community's elders while acting differently in private with one's peers. Third, as Matt's friend showed him, one can be "real" with one's peers in a way that is in alignment with the values of the community's elders. Matt is striving to transition from the "reality" of his old community to his new community's standards of being "real."

> Alice: If your thinking was different from the community's and you expressed it, but in your mind it was honest and real, and good, could you do that?
>
> Matt: ….Like, here's for an instance. You wouldn't ask something…like, if I was at my friend's house and something was on TV and talking about drugs, you know, I would say to my friend's dad, he lives in Roswell now, I would say to him, "Did you smoke weed in high school?" That's something that if you said that up here, it would be like, "I can't believe you asked that." Even if they probably did. They would be like, "I can't believe you had the nerve to say that!" But it's not open…
>
> Alice: What do you think that is? It's almost like decorum or a way of having manners. Do you…does that keep kids from being…having adults to turn to? I mean can you turn to an adult and say to an adult honestly when you can't ask them questions like that?
>
> Matt: Yeah, you can. Well, yeah, I mean you could if you pulled someone aside or if you got them private. But say you're all sitting around the living room and crack off and just say something like that as goofing off or just talking about something. You know that you don't really talk about subjects like that, so, it's not like you hide them, but you don't joke about them and sit there and use slang words to talk about them.

> Alice: It sounds like you are almost talking about a respect for the older generation.
>
> Matt: Yeah. Yeah.
>
> Alice: Like you don't put them on the same level as you and you don't say, "We're buds, we can talk about anything."
>
> Matt: Yeah, that ain't the way it's…I guess that's the way I've always grown up, and that's not the way it is here.
>
> Alice: Do you think that's helped you in your outlook on life? Or has it hindered you? Or both?
>
> Matt: Well, I've learned that you need to be respectful and sometimes, it's best to hold your tongue. And that's…I guess…yeah, that works up here, but what about elsewhere? Is that something that's useful elsewhere? I find that it is, sometimes--to be able to just keep your mouth shut when you feel like opening it, which I do often. And I guess maybe that's always been a problem with me, not just here, but everywhere. I always have a comment about everything, and I always want to express it. I'm real opinionated.
>
> Alice: Well, I mean, is that a bad thing?
>
> Matt: No, not if you know how to deal with it. If you know how to. I mean, there's the wrong time and the right time to express your opinions.
>
> Alice: Are there some opinions that you don't feel comfortable enough to ever express?
>
> Matt: No. Because I know there is always a way to express everything. It's just that you've got to know when and how.

Matt's considers this accomplishment of restraint necessary for to navigating within the community and earning his membership. Rather than view this process as a form of censure or a demand for conformity, Matt finds it to be a useful skill that is applicable to settings outside of the local community.

> Alice: Well, wonder if you had some kind of thinking that was complex that was very true to your heart, but was in opposition to the thinking of the school?
>
> Matt: Oh. Well, me, I voice it. You can ask Ms. --, I've been screaming, "Why are we going to block scheduling? We are jumping on the bandwagon, blindfolded." Because I was the only one in the whole county who did any investigation into it. …So that gets me into a lot of trouble.

Matt himself contributes to the community through advising his peers and instructing younger students on how to find their own way within the school community, encouraging them to demonstrate the same type of restraint he has learned.

> Alice: Well, someone told me when we were talking that one of the things that worried him was that when a kid messes up or when a teacher, even, messes up or has a bad reputation, it's almost impossible to fix that reputation. That it always stays with you.
>
> Matt: It's not. I'm proof of that. When I came here, I was looked at as someone who is annoying as crap, talkative, always getting in trouble, and who just wouldn't try in school. And, teachers are…when you get into trouble all the time…teachers are looking for you to get into trouble. And, this is what I am always trying to tell a person like (a younger student) who gets in trouble all the time. I try to tell him, "Yeah, well, sure people tell on you all the time. Show them [they are] wrong." I tell him, "Just don't do anything wrong." And [he] will say, "Yeah, well they still blame me!" And, "Yeah, they will, because they expect you to. But you've got to be able to hold your tongue and not pop back and say, 'I didn't do anything!'" That's something that took me a year and a half to do. And you ask any teacher in here about the person I was in seventh grade and eighth grade and the one I am now.

Matt encourages a younger student to be "real" in a way that the community values, by doing what is considered to be right, staying out of trouble, and demonstrating restraint. Matt looks to himself as someone who has been able to change and adapt in a new community setting. He credits his himself, God, and his former girlfriend for his transformation.

Theme: Kinship-Like Connections. Though the relationship between his former girlfriend and him has evolved into something different than what it once was, it is still part of Matt's support system as he struggles to find what is right for him.

Alice: What helped you? What taught you to do [better]?

Matt: Umm, myself and God. I just looked at myself and I said, "Okay, high school is around the corner. I need to grow up now." Now, I've never done homework in my life and I always got bad grades for it. And, you know, I never needed to, but the more you got into middle school and stuff and the more homework was required, so the more it hurt me. In ninth grade I made As and Bs, because that was like I actually started trying in ninth grade. It was really hard to actually do homework. It was really hard. In tenth grade, I had a lot of home problems and I kind of gave up. That really hurt me. In tenth grade I made some Cs. I was failing some classes; I had never failed a class, and I was failing physics and English.

Alice: What helped you through it?

Matt: (A girl student) did a great part. She's been my girlfriend, my best friend, my mother for the past two years. She's been all that to me.

Alice: I find that there are not that many romantic relationships here, but the ones that are here are very mature in a very calm way. They are these nurturing kinds of romantic relationships rather than just sexual. They feel richer, more complex.

Matt: Yes, it's very different here.

Alice: But you all aren't a couple now, right?

Matt: No.

Alice: But you still have a friendship?

Matt: Yeah, we are trying to hold on to it, but it is very hard because she broke up with me. She's been going out with me since she was 13. She wanted to break up

> because she kind of wondered what else was out there. And of course, yeah, because she needs to. If I try to hold on to her, and let's say we get married, that feeling isn't just going to go away of what else is out there and that will really cause problems. So, I'm aware of that and I'm not going to try and hold her. But I wanted to break up—it was a mutual thing—I wanted to break up because I wanted to get my life straightened up, and as long as you are in a situation to where it's easy to mess up, then it's hard to get your life straight.
>
> Alice: Well, that would be another hard thing, I think, about going to a small school is that it's not like going to a large school where you could go off with another group and avoid each other…
>
> Matt: Yeah, and like when you make an enemy…what are you going to…that's one of the things is that when you make an enemy, you've got to make up. If you don't, then you by yourself [sic]. That's why there's no cliques much. There used to be a little bit for a little while, but not really. That's why it's hard to stay enemies.

Because Woody Gap is literally such a small school, it is sometimes out of necessity that its members endeavor to maintain relationships. As Matt asserts, there is no place to hide or to escape when you are in contact with the same group of peers day after day, year after year. So friends try to stay friends. And though romantic ties change, as they did in Matt's case, they may not rupture to the degree that they could in other, larger school settings. The need to continue long-term relationships may explain why so few Woody Gap students date each other and why community members are encouraged to bridle their expression, as Matt feels the need to do.

Another way Matt contributes to the school community is through protecting his peers, much like a sibling; he alerts them to others' characteristics or traits that may be unacceptable to the group. Matt provides an example.

> I'll tell you this one story. When I came up here in fourth grade, I went here until sixth grade and I moved back to Roswell and came back in seventh. In sixth grade

> I was up here visiting and there is this boy from Pennsylvania: I know he had lived in Pennsylvania before, whatever, and he was a real punk, and he thought he was a thug. Anyways, L-- was sitting down here and she was hanging out with him. And she was sitting with him and holding his hand. And I pulled her aside some other time when he wasn't there, and I said, "L--, I'm telling you. He is trouble." I didn't know the guy well. I just know his type. I said, "L--, the way he talks, the way he walks, everything. He's trouble. He's not what you want." She's like, "Oh, no. He's really sweet." I said, "L--, he is trouble." Then, later on, I came back in seventh grade and I hear about how he was running his mouth, and L-- took him and shoved him into a locker and made his face bleed, you know. Beat him up. Later on, L-- told me, "You were right. I should have listened to you."

Matt felt a duty to his friend to protect her from someone who came from the outside and whom Matt did not trust. His mistrust could have stemmed from the fact that the "outsider" was not conforming to community standards ("…he was a real punk, and he thought he was a thug.") and the fact that Matt has had experience in other schools and may not be as trusting as some of his friends who have only been to Woody Gap.

Like an older brother, Matt felt a responsibility to protect his classmate. The family atmosphere of the school may also make it more acceptable for students of different ages and grade levels to spend time together and be friends than it would be in other larger schools.

> Matt: And things like I've got friends in the fourth and fifth grade. Yesterday somebody asked me, said, you know, I was hanging out with my friend that you saw in the picture with his mom, and they said, "Are you twins?" And I said, "Are you serious? We aren't even related and I am three years older than him." And the guy was like, "You're a freshman and you're a senior? What's a senior hanging out with a freshman for?" And I was like, "He's my best friend, man." I have friends in sixth grade, eighth grade, and fifth grade that I hang out with and spend

time with. I mean I've got a sixth grade friend and I spend a lot of time with him, just hanging out.

Alice: And do you think of yourself as having adult friends as well?

Matt: Yeah, like [a community adult] for one. Yeah, I've been meaning to go to his house lately, but I've been so busy, just to talk with him.

As we finished our discussions around school and community, Matt offered his mental picture. For it he describes how students of different ages and grade levels come to feel affection and closeness with each other.

Matt: Yeah. I'll tell you about the [picture] on the computer I wanted to include.

Alice: Okay.

Matt: Okay, the one on the computer is one of the garden. We were down in the garden; we are building a garden for our local studies [class] and there were a bunch of kids down there. And, [an older high schooler] was sitting on the ground, propped up against a log like this, and he had a couple of kindergartners sitting around him, sitting and talking with him, you know. I saw this before, before I started doing this study for you. I just saw it on my own and said, "Gee, that's kind of funny." That is something about around here, connection between the young and the old as far as students and elders in the community and little kids at school, big kids at school...

Although Matt did not express a vision for the future of Woody Gap School, it is obvious from our conversations that the school and its members are important to him. He has experienced profound change as a result of his moving back to the community and school. Matt is gratified for the change, and he now sees his role as one who can guide and mentor those in the school and community setting who would benefit.

Joy

Having lived and attended school in Suches all of her life, Joy is an active senior and leader at Woody Gap School. She is a busy student who has a quiet dedication to hard work. Her willingness to take on difficult tasks while maintaining a strong academic record has earned her the respect and admiration of those who know her. In the near future, Joy plans to commute to a nearby college while remaining in her native community and continuing to contribute to her community and alma mater.

As a participant in this study, Joy created photographs representative of school and community and then responded to her photographs in writing and in talking with me. She explained how she perceives the relationship between her school and community by providing examples of activities that illustrate connections she feels exist between the two. These activities involve the support of school and community members of different generations but with common values.

Question 2: School and Community Interactions

Theme: Activities and Traditions. Activities Joy chose to represent and to discuss illustrate her thinking and feeling about the relationship between school and community. The presence of community members at school-related activities help to validate the significance of the occasions for Joy.

Community members support seniors at Baccalaureate service. Discussing how proud they were of the seniors.

Joy: This is a picture of baccalaureate we had, and this is them discussing, talking about how good the ceremony went…

Alice: What church was that?

Joy: Zion Baptist Church.

Alice: And you know who all those ladies are?

Joy: Yes. (She names them)

Alice: How do you know them?

Joy: Her husband (points to one of the women in the picture) goes on these trips with us to old homesites.

Even the younger students get involved, showing how close everyone in the school is and how supportive they are.

Now, this picture shows how involved the little kids are with it. I mean they are not even part of anybody, they're not a sister or brother or anything to any of the graduates, yet they come, because we are so close to them. We know everybody.

Gathering of School and Community Showing their Concern for School Activities.

> And this here, everybody is talking. Everybody knows everybody. The community is there to get together. It's nice that they come out to support us like they do.
>
> Alice: Yes, it is. Is it at different churches every year?
>
> Joy: No, it's usually at this one. We could hold it at another church, but the main reason they have it there is because of the fellowship hall out here is so big and the other churches ain't got one.

As a means of contributing to the social capital of the community, community members, young or old, kin or not, attend school activities to show their support and to spend time with one another. Joy sees her fellow graduates as members of not just her school class, but as members of her community as well.

Memory for Me. ***Also a Blessing to be Graduating with Such Wonderful People That I Know Very Well Due to Our Rural Community.***

> Joy: (Looks at fourth picture.) And here is us all together…

Theme: Community Support of School. Members of the community bring their expertise to the campus and to the classroom and share it with students. For example, they assist students in the production of goods that can be shared with community, providing opportunities for students to add to the economic capital of Suches. A venue for student contributions, Indian Summer Festival, presents another opportunity for community and school to meet on common ground.

The Garden

> Okay that's our garden. Well, we had [a community member] come down to plow and show us how to use the mule and the plow. And they are going to come when we harvest it; they are going to show us how to can stuff and harvest stuff….And they are going to try to make honey and sell that at the Festival, and they are also going to try to sell stuff from the garden like potatoes and stuff.
>
> Alice: Talk a little bit about the Festival. The Indian Summer Festival: I've heard that mentioned quite a bit since I've been here. That's a really big deal.
>
> Joy: It is a big deal. There is like two or three thousand people who show up out in the field. There's everything: quilt shows, boiled peanuts, army guards come, steam engines, ox and mules, cows, pigs, sheep…

Joy included the school's Academic Banquet and the Future Farmers of America Club's work at the Personal Care Home in her list of mental photographs she wished she had taken with her camera. Both activities involve members of multiple generations who are providing support to the school or the community.

Alice: Well, are there any pictures around school and community that you didn't take that you wished you did, showing connections?

Joy: Yeah. I would have taken pictures of Academic Banquet, because that shows a lot of community. Parents come out and support the kids and are there for that. Also, I was aiming to get a picture up there of the Personal Care Home when we planted those flowers for them.

Alice: Do you know most of the people up there in the Personal Care Home?

Joy: Some of them, yeah. I've been up there and know some of them, and they know me. I come up there, and they say, "Hey, Joy!" (laughs).

Joy's Vision for Future Involvement with the School

Joy feels a strong sense of place in Suches and at Woody Gap School as evidenced by the level of her participation in school and community activities and her determination to stay in the Suches area. Unlike many other bright rural students who often leave their small and isolated communities (contributing to local "brain drain"), Joy hopes to continue her involvement with local activities important to the school and the community.

Alice: Are you going to come back [to Woody Gap] after you graduate?

Joy: Oh yeah! I plan on coming to everything I can.

Alice: What are your plans? What do you plan to do when you finish?

Joy: I'm going to college, North Georgia.

Alice: Are you going to live at home and commute?

Joy: Yes.

Alice: So do you see yourself staying in Suches for awhile?

Joy: Yes.

Alice: Why?

Joy: I don't know. I just iike the ruralness. I don't like a big crowd. I've never been the socializer type. If someone speaks to me, then I speak to them, but usually they have to speak first.

Alice: Well, do you feel like you are prepared then if you did move to another place? Could you do that?

Joy: I could, but I wouldn't want to. I don't think I would be happy.

Alice: Um hmmm, is this who you are? Or is this from going to a small school that's isolated?

Joy: It's just who I am really.

Alice: Any other picture you would take, if you could have?

Joy: I don't know. The main thing I see is to tell you how involved we are…everyone really supports the school. Like if the school needs something, like the student council, they donate stuff or get money. Sometimes we have to [go outside of the community], but most of the time we can get it here if the community gets word of it, they will pitch in and help.

Alice: Are you one of those community members?

Joy: Oh yeah. I am going to come back and be very involved with this school.

Alice: So if Woody Gap School wasn't here, what do you think it would be like living up here?

Joy: I don't know.

Alice: Do you come to the school during the summer?

Joy: Um hmmm, I'm here a lot in the summer.

Alice: What are you doing here, when you come here?

Joy: I come here and help them here. I mow the grass and just come down here to see what they are doing and to talk with them.

Alice: Something to do. So, do you feel drawn to the school?

Joy: Oh, yeah. For some reason (laughs).

Alice: (Laughs) Well, I think anybody that's spent 13 years of their young life at one place, you've got to feel a connection.

Joy: And for so long. I'm here sometimes 18 hours a day.

Alice: You are here a lot of times when teachers are gone.

Joy: I am. And, I'm here before most of them are here.

Alice: Wow. That's because you get up at four in the morning.

Joy: Yeah, I'm usually here at 6:30 or 7 o'clock. And that ain't no joke!

There is no mistaking that Joy finds school a pleasant place to be and an important part of her life. Having attended school in on this campus all of her life, Joy feels a strong connection to Woody Gap. As an adult, she intends to continue her association with the school and its members. Hopefully, she will find ways to continue to contribute to the school and community as Charlie, now an adult in her home community, has been able to do.

Henry

A rising junior, Henry has attended Woody Gap School all of his life. He is involved in many school extracurricular activities including the National Future Farmers of America (FFA) organization and Student Council. Henry attends a local church and likes to spend time with his friends camping on their property. Through his photographs and our discussions, Henry described some of his own activities and other activities that create opportunities for interactions between school and community.[4]

Question 2: School and Community Interactions

Theme: Student Involvement in the Community. While Henry is aware and appreciative of the support that adults in the community provide for younger members, he also recognizes the positive impact students can have on their elders' experiences in the community, as well.

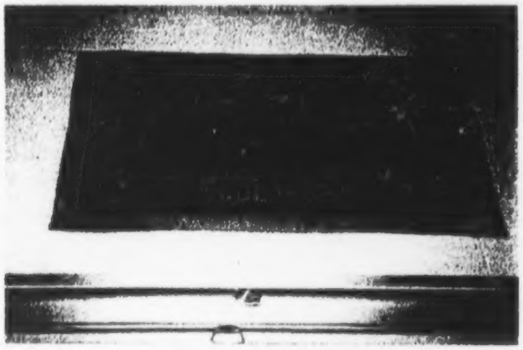
> I think the kids [have] a big impact on the community. You know, getting out in the community and helping. Like when we go on the field trips to the old home sites. A lot of the older folks, they really like doing stuff with the kids. I think that they enjoy it, and it makes the community more enjoyable. They have more things to do. It helps…grow together, you know?

---

[4] Henry chose not to respond to his photographs in writing.

Henry sees a mutual benefit in having several generations involved community activities and by having young people involved in these activities, older members in the community are more apt to participate.

This involvement of young people in community activities can emanate from the classroom. Henry provided a couple of examples of these types of student involvement.



> I took a picture of the FAA banner because that represents community, the kids from the school get involved with community. We are just getting started....One of the major things we've done so far is planted the flowers around the nursing home and the school. We are also getting ready to go to FAA camp this summer to learn some more stuff, like how to elect officers.

Henry expanded his list of student actions that involve the community when he described his mental photograph. He talked about how students are involved with the annual Indian Summer Festival.

Alice: . . . if you could take a picture of something that represents school and community together. . . .

Henry: Like events or. . .

Alice: Yeah, events or things that are special to you. . .

Henry: You might have heard this one, but the Indian Summer Festival is a school and community thing, like the square dances.

Alice: Well, as a student, how does is that a big deal for you? Do you participate?

Henry: Yeah, of course the students have their booths, you know, to get ready for the prom, and they can sell stuff or have games, or whatever they might choose to do to get money for the prom when they are juniors.

Alice: Is it assumed that everybody will participate?

Henry: Yeah, if you're in the class, they will make out a work schedule. It's part of the class. It's actually part of the school because it's been around for awhile.

Alice: Yeah, 23 years, I heard--A long time! And do community members participate that aren't associated with the school?

Henry: Yeah, a lot of them come out and have booths. Some come out just to look around. And of course, we have the Sports Club auction. The community members come out and buy the things that the teams go around and collect to support the sports program.

Theme: Community Support of School. Students, teachers, and community members and organizations participate in activities that benefit Woody Gap School and provide opportunities for the community to touch base with the school. Like the Indian Summer Festival, sports events are mutually beneficial for the school and community. They provide opportunities for the community to regularly connect with the school and other community members. In turn, the community provides the school with moral and financial support for its student players.

Photograph did not develop

I took a picture of my varsity jacket, because that shows how the community is always involved with our sports activities. They always turn out for the basketball games, tennis matches, and stuff like that. They are always there to support us. Um....Community members are always there to support us. They will travel to the away games to make sure that we have some fans, you know.

Alice: Are there community members, who don't have kids at the school, who go?

Henry: Yeah, a lot of the older folks...I know a guy who lives up the road from me, he always comes to ball games, and his kids are grown, and he is up in his seventies, but he just likes to come, you know, and support the team.

Question 1: Conceptualizing the Relationship Between School and Community

Theme: Kinship-Like Connections. Although the availability of different sports programs is limited at Woody Gap, Henry does not seem to begrudge those limitations because of what he sees as the trade-offs the school would experience by having school numbers large enough to sustain additional programs, namely, losing the intimacy that gives the school the feel of a large family.

Alice: Well, what things are not available to you that might be available to you somewhere else? What are you missing?

Henry: Just some of the sports, football.

Alice: I'm sure Union County people take one look at you and say, "Hey, you can come to Blairsville."

Henry: Yeah, you miss, it's sort of hard to say, because you might miss a lot by being here, but you get a lot being here. It's sort of tradeoff. The popularity at a bigger school. Here you get a better education. Also, your friendships grow more, because, you know, you're around people for so long, like me and J--, we've gone to school here since kindergarten, and before kindergarten. You know, I think at a bigger school you have friends like that, but it's not like you are a big family. You see what I am saying?

Henry values the intimacy and family atmosphere he finds at Woody Gap School over some of the other advantages that a larger school might offer. We discussed what it means to learn in a small setting that mirrors being a close-knit family.

Alice: But sometimes I'm tired of my family and I want to get away from my family. I mean I grew up with four brothers and sisters, and sometimes we fought and stuff. Does it ever feel like that where you just feel like you have known people for so long that you are tired of being around them? It gets on your nerves?

Henry: Not really. It's real hard to fight with people here, know what I mean? Like if you get in a fight with somebody, the next hour, you know, you're talking to them again, because you have no choice. You can't get away from them, so you're stuck with them and you're miserable.

When a school is small, it is can be a more intimate setting and its members more visible than in a larger school. Henry appreciates the closeness this intimacy affords, while realizing it may also require students to negotiate understandings that allow them to get along with others.

Alice: What about, say you're a kid who gets into trouble when you come here. Is it possible to change your ways or do people always think of you as a bad kid once you get into trouble?

Henry: It really depends on the kid, like you have to be willing to change. Like some kids just have bad attitudes but most of the kids I've seen do just fine.

Alice: Have you seen kids turn around?

Henry: Oh, yeah. I've seen…that's why a lot of people like…people who have family here, like if their kid is struggling, they'll send kid up here. You know, I had a friend like that who came up here. He was in a lot of trouble, drugs and stuff. When he got up here and started to go to church and stuff and got involved with the youth group and changed environments, you know, where there's not all this crime and all the crowds to get mixed up with. Like when I talk to him on the phone now, he's like, because he had to move back, you know, and he still stays straight. He said, "You don't know what a paradise you have up there." Because he lives in the city and you never know when there is going to be crime happening right in front of you. You know, it's sort of makes you think, because we take advantage of it, for granted that we have such an isolated…

Alice: Once you've had someone take advantage of you or you have been a victim, it's hard to go back to trust people again. And I think that's one thing you really do have here is trust. But, how far does that trust…if you had a troubled time in your life, or maybe you didn't do so well, do you trust that the community would support you and that they would still embrace you?

Henry: I think so. I do. But I'm sure other people don't feel that way. I would think so.

Although Henry is not yet an adult, he is already an active member in his community and school. As a local citizen and student, Henry has his own insights about the school's relationship with the community and what it is like to attend Woody Gap School while living in Suches. He has had the opportunity to observe and consider school and community interactions through his own experiences and those of other students with whom he interacts on a daily basis at school. Henry has strong ties to his community through his involvement with family, church, and school. The intersections of those ties impact his thinking around what it means to go to school while living in Suches. During our discussions, he talked about his photographs, relating what he thinks is important to know about school and community.

Theme: Involvement in the Community. Outside of school, Henry is an active church member who regularly participates in and leads a variety of programs and activities. Several other high school students from Woody Gap School attend his church, joining in on many of the its activities.

And here is a picture of my church. That's Mt, Lebanon Church. I've belonged to the church all my life, so it means a lot to me, and the people that go there.

And this (looking at next picture) is Easter Sunday.

Let's see, I took a picture of our puppet team shirt. Our church has a puppet ministry that we do, where we put on real advanced puppet shows. Some of the kids from the school are on the puppet team. So, we do that: go around to different churches all over. We put on performances. Like one time, we put on this fifties, a fifties thing. We had a barber shop…Also during August, the first week of August, some of us will go up to Illinois where you can learn like a technique, see all the new puppets and stuff.

Let's see. I'm teaching Bible School at my church to little kids. I took a picture of my Bible School study books.

Alice: What grade are you going to teach?

Henry: First and second grade.

Alice: You are really good with little kids. At Old-Fashion Day, you were really good with talking to them.

Henry: Yeah, I enjoy being around little kids.

Attending church and Woody Gap School has afforded Henry the opportunity to interact with younger children in a positive manner. While at the school, I observed Henry as he served as the Master of Ceremonies for Old-Fashion Day. It was obvious that he took his role as an older student and leader in the school very seriously. During a costume contest, he spoke to each of the young students in the school with great respect and good-natured humor. Having lived and learned in Suches all of his life, Henry's trust may stem from his deep connection to the school and community. As he explains, it is all he knows.

> Alice: Um, do you see yourself living in Woody Gap when you get older?
>
> Henry: It's real hard to say. Like, my parents, they drive. Like I said, my dad, he drives to Pendergrass every day. You sort of have to go where the jobs are and it's real hard to say, but I would like to stay in Suches. That's my first choice, to stay in Suches.
>
> Alice: So you don't feel a desire to get away or to get out?
>
> Henry: Oh, not at all, not at all.
>
> Alice: What do you think helped you…I know that there are some kids who have felt that way here, that they couldn't wait to get out into the "real world." What do you think is the difference between you and a kid that feels that way? I mean…
>
> Henry: A lot of kids that have not gone here all their life, like say late middle school, seventh or eighth grade, you know, they miss the old, bigger school, living in the city, being able to do things every night of the week. But when you've gone to school here all your life you don't know anything else. So, I have a desire to stay. I don't have the desire to go to the big city.
>
> Alice: Are you afraid to go to the big city?
>
> Henry: No, I'm not afraid. I'd rather be out sitting in the woods than going to a mall or something, you know?

Henry provides some examples that illustrate his attraction to Suches: his love of the outdoors and spending time with friends.

> This is our campsite that we have on my friend's lake. And we're building a dock. And, uh, it's sort of in the beginning stages right now. We cut down all the weeds around it. You see, it's a private lake. It's Woody's Lake. I've grown up with [these friends] all my life. They used to go to school here, but when their mom got a job teaching in Lumpkin County, they had to go with her. So, they go to Lumpkin County. That's my friend and a picture of our campsite.

> That's a picture of a cow paddy. See, we used to have string across the entrance to our campsite to keep the cows from getting in. Well, something knocked our rope down. So, they got in there and we saw it and took a picture of it, because we step in it all the time (laughs).

And there is a picture of my friend's four wheeler and Vanilla Wafers, because we always have Vanilla Wafers when we go camping.

Henry's love for his surroundings has given him pause to consider what leaving Suches might mean for him. He also realizes what not leaving has meant for his parents, both must drive considerable distances to work. While Henry seems to be tied to the community with a strong sense of place, he does go places. For example, he recently traveled to Nebraska with schoolmates to present at a national conference on rural education. As mentioned earlier, his church work takes him to training sessions in other parts of the country. Henry has also formed friendships with students outside of school through extracurricular school activities and church work.

Henry's Vision for the Future of the Relationship Between School and Community

At the close of our interview, I asked Henry about his ideas for making Woody Gap School a better place for learning. His response reflected his close ties to school and community.

> Alice: Well, if you could change Woody Gap, and you may not want to, but if you could think of anything that you could change tomorrow and for the better for Woody Gap, what would that be? What would you like to see?
>
> Henry: I'd like to see better facilities, like, the gym is fine in my opinion, but new lunchroom. And of course, they are renovating [them] now. Other than that, I don't see...

> Alice: What about the size? Would you like to see it a little bit bigger, smaller, organized differently?
>
> Henry: It's sort of hard to say. If you say size, there's what, 21 kids in the high school, something like that? If you say that you would like it bigger, then when it's bigger, you're going to complain that you like it smaller. But when it's smaller then you say, I wish there were more girls in the school, you know how that goes.
>
> Alice: So maybe the social aspect?
>
> Henry: But then you wouldn't really want to change it, it's just something you want to think about. I mean I don't think I would change it.
>
> Alice: What about your course offerings? Do you find that the teachers, the school is able to offer what you need?
>
> Henry: Yeah, I think so. I think for the small amount of teachers we have, the academic program is run really well.
>
> Alice: Is there anything you wanted to take that you couldn't get?
>
> Henry: You mean at the school, that a bigger school might have?
>
> Alice: Um, hmm.
>
> Henry: Well, I think auto mechanics and welding are some things that I would like to do. But I think they are going to try and get a bit of that started next year. So, I guess that it just takes time.

Henry has advice to offer for improving Woody Gap School, but his advice is tempered with patience and an underlying acceptance of realistic constraints that occur when a school is small and isolated.

> ...like when a new family comes in, you know, it's hard to be accepted into the community if you haven't live here a long time, so I think the school sort of breaks the ice, because once you start meeting teachers and meeting other people, it sort of breaks the ice for new people coming in.

Henry sees the school as place that helps facilitate the introduction of new members into the community. He equates the intimacy of Woody Gap School to that of being part of a "big family," an experience Henry feels is not possible in a larger school. He is willing to do without some of the programs and extras available in big schools, such as football and better facilities, because Henry finds the closeness and personal attention that comes with a small school setting is more important for him as a student and member of the community.

Summary of Findings

The eight stories presented here as public photoessays are findings to questions I wanted to explore to help me better understand what the relationship between a small rural school in Northeast Georgia and its surrounding community was like. The first question, "How do educators, students, and community members conceptualize the relationship between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" was "answered" by individual participant photographs and elicitations and organized around themes of family connections to the school and community, rules of conduct, being an outsider in the community and school settings, perceptions of a school family, and historical considerations. The overlap and distinction of these themes across cases are presented in the next chapter.

The second question, "What kinds of interactions do educators, students, and community members have between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" was responded to by most of the participants. They provided a list of a variety of activities, traditions, and cooperative efforts that invite school and community interactions. Interactions provided include examples of support the community gives to the school, past and present, mutual reliance of school and community on each other, and school-community observances and rituals. In the cross-case analysis, I have consolidated the lists of interactions, highlighting several of those that appear to be held most dear and of most importance by groups of participants, as well as individual participants.

The third question asks for the participant's vision for the future of the relationship between Woody Gap School and the Suches community. Many participants had strong ideas about what this future relationship should look like and what was needed to achieve it: some student participants saw their own involvement continuing after graduation. Several older participants worried about the youth of the community and how they would be prepared as citizens of their community and the outside world. Many participants expressed hopes, as their visions, for a reclamation of the old school auditorium, reinstated as the community and school social center. An icon for the past and the future, the auditorium would once again connect the school and community, providing a place for school and community plays, performances, town hall meetings, socials, and fundraisers. Along with the return to a refurbished auditorium, these participants envisioned the construction of a new school-public media center. This center would serve both the students and faculty of Woody Gap School and the citizens of the Suches community, providing an economic, intergenerational approach to continuing education and technology training.

The next chapter presents a cross-case analysis of participant-produced data, arranged as themes common to more than one of the participants and themes specific to individual participants. For the chapter, I used the three questions guiding my research as the organizers for themes. Data from participants' private photoessays, participant's photographs, photofeedback, and photointerview transcriptions were used to create the themes.

CHAPTER 6

CROSS-CASE FINDINGS

In Chapter 5, I presented the findings of a within-case analysis of eight participants' private photoessays. In this chapter I present findings from the cross-case analysis of the data collected from the same participants. The participants, three teachers, two community members, and three students, all have an intimate knowledge about the school and its surrounding community.

For this chapter, I again used the three questions guiding my research as the organizers for themes. Data from participants' private photoessays, participant's photographs, photofeedback, and photointerview transcriptions were used to create the themes. Themes were organized under two of the three research questions:

1) How do educators, students, and community members conceptualize the relationship between this small rural school and its surrounding community?

2) What kinds of interactions do educators, students, and community members have between this small rural school and its surrounding community?

Individual responses were organized under the third research question:

3) How do educators, students, and community members envision the future for the relationship between this school and its community?

As explained in Chapter 5, the above questions deal with participants' perceptions and experiences, and it was sometimes difficult to assign some of their responses to strictly one category or question. For example, some participants' responses dealt with cause and effect, so, it was often difficult to tell where discussions of relationship ended and listings of interactions began: participants might discuss some interactions as having affected the school-community relationship or some aspects of the school-community relationship having impacted interactions. To avoid redundancy, I chose to present data once within the category I felt was a best fit.

The first part of this chapter is a discussion of themes found to be common to more than one of the participants. Rather than embedding into the chapter the public photoessays already created for a within-case analysis, I avoid repetition of lengthy data excerpts by presenting here a brief discussion of commonalities found among participant responses. To better assist the reader in recognizing commonalities highlighted in the discussion, I have organized participant-produced photographs, their captions (photofeedback), and some transcribed oral responses from the photointerviews as collages and inserted them as figures throughout the discussion that is first part of this chapter.

The second part of the chapter is the themes specific to individual participants. Examining each participant's private photoessay and looking for differences across cases, I created themes for the research questions one and two. Findings for the third research question, "How do educators, students, and community members envision the future for the relationship between this school and its community?" are organized as individual responses. The reason being that each vision was unique to that particular participant. For each individual theme or response, I provide supporting documentation from the data.

Common Themes

Looking across cases, I have identified eight common themes (see Table 5) and organized them within two of the three research questions. For each research question, I first identify the common theme followed by supporting documentation from the data. Finally, I present a summary of common themes.

Question 1: Conceptualizing the Relationship between School and Community

Theme: Kinship Connections. By the very fact that Woody Gap School is small and situated in an isolated community, many of its students are related to each other. Surnames such as "Woody," "Grizzle," "Pickelsimer ," "Garrett," and "Tritt" have been shared by numerous students in the school since its construction and by others in the community since its settlement by Whites in the 1830's. New families moving into this

Table 5.
Common Themes

Common Themes	
Question 1	Kinship Connections Kinship-Like Connections Outsiders and Rules for Conduct Exclusivity Community Involvement
Question 2	Community Support of the School Activities and Traditions Mutual Reliance

area may not necessarily share the same last names with residents, but family members do find opportunities to share experiences together with other community members and with each other, as they study, work, and play. Charlie, Jim, Matt, and Hank specifically referred to kinship connections in the community and school, as they discussed the relationship between Woody Gap School and its surrounding community (see Figure 16).

Charlie produced a photo of a tree for her photoessay. She wrote about the tree as a symbol for her "personal family ties to the school and the community." Later, in a photointerview, she held her photograph and described how the school and community were important influences and settings for her family members:

> I pulled in not only what I felt like was the school and community's involvement, but also some family involvements in the community and the school. And, some of this stuff is related to what it has done for me and how it has molded me to be the person I am today.

Charlie pointed to the school as the setting for important family rites of passages and events. For example, Woody Gap is where she met her husband. As a nursing student, she would visit the school campus to observe the health occupations class. The softball coach, her future husband, recruited her to play on the school softball team. As a student in the school, she followed her grandmother's footsteps when she was elected by her class to be its valedictorian. Her maternal grandfather graduated from the school's Veteran's Program, a class of World War II veterans who had returned to complete their education. Some of the same teachers who taught her also taught her parents. Woody Gap was also the place where her parents met. Both her mother and husband are teachers in the school. Charlie identifies these connections as powerful influences on her thinking about school and community and on her development as a person. Now, as a teacher's spouse, community health care professional, and parent, Charlie is able to continue long-held familial connections between school and community.

Wedding. This picture demonstrates one of the most important aspects of my personal life, and its tie to the school.

If I had a person in the picture, it would be maybe my son, a person from the school, because he learns something, this particular trip from [a community member who] is a retired Forest Ranger, so that kind of embodies this community-school relationship.

This is a picture of a rock with a plaque on it that says "W. Arthur Woody, Pioneer Conservationist."...Most places you don't really have some history to identify with where you live, but he is kind of a legend around here....The Woody name is kinda like in Old England, you know, where names were a big thing, your last name was, you know, was a huge part of who you were.

The Tree. This picture symbolizes my personal family ties to the school and the community.

Cooper is just a huge name for areas around here. I assume it was a family name at one time....Everyone here I'm related to....So, that's my part of how I am here. That's something I hold on to, because that's how I can say this is my culture too. That's what ties me in....So, it's neat how you can see how everyone's related. I can do that with just about anyone in this school..

Into the house where we are still. Involvement in the community began quickly because the lake and the rest of the recreation area was (and is) heavily used by the community kids and we came to know most of them. Our son, then 14, joined them pretty seamlessly. [My wife] visited the school to ask if our son could use the outdoor basketball goal and was told by the then principal that, not only would it be ok, but when school closed for the summer, the gym was left open and a couple of basketballs were left out for the kids and young adults.

Figure 16. Kinship Connections Collage

Like Charlie, Jim has a spouse who is a teacher at the local school. His children attended Woody Gap, and he has been an active volunteer at the school and in the community for years. Unlike Charlie, Jim is not native-born to the area. Jim's and his family's entrance into Suches began while they were on vacation at a local outdoor recreation area.

> We were campground hosts for about seven seasons. And what we did was just see to the campers' needs. The other picture is of overlooking the lake, very near to where the host cabin used to be. And we could sit there in the morning; go down and sit on big old piece of log and watch the sun come up over that little lake down there. You can just barely see the swimming area in the lake down there, which is where all the kids in the community hung out. Which is what I think I said [later] is sort of what got us in our dealings with the community.

When they did move to Suches, Jim and his wife were impressed with the school principal's offer to let Jim's son use the gym to occupy his time during the long summer days. The fact that the gym was left unlocked with basketballs deliberately left out for the occasional summer pickup game struck a chord of community that resonated with Jim's family. As his family settled in, Jim became very active in the community; his wife secured a job as a teacher at the school; and his son enrolled there as a student. Jim found ways to tie work, family, school, and community interactions together. For example, Jim volunteered to run hikers back and forth from Atlanta to the Appalachian Trail for a fee. The proceeds would go the school or the volunteer fire department.

> ...If somebody that was coming through here, [if] I had shuttled a hiker [that] was from some crazy, far away, exotic place or something like that, or if they just...you know, career-wise, if they, professionally, somehow or other, were interesting, [my wife] would just shanghai them. Just run over to Gooch Gap and scoop them up and carry them down to the school, give them breakfast, make them talk to a couple of [my wife]'s classes; just give them lunch and then, carry them back up to the Gap and send them on their way again.

Jim's ferrying of hikers benefited the school financially and provided outside resources such as guest speakers for the school where his son was enrolled and his wife's classes. Jim took advantage of opportunities to help the school and the community, while assisting his family.

Like Jim, Hank is not native-born to the area but has lived in the community for a number of years. Hank is a teacher at the school. His spouse has taught there and continues to work in the school as a volunteer. Both Hank and his wife see to it that their family is an active partner in the affairs of the school and the community. Hank appreciates the educational resources the school and community afford his children through activities such as the intergenerational "Walkie-Talkie" outings:

> My family and children go along, and there's a wide range of folks and ages....If I had a person in the picture, it would be maybe my son, a person from the school, because he learns something, this particular trip from [a volunteer who] is a retired Forest Ranger, so that kind of embodies this community-school relationship.

Like Jim and Hank, Matt was not born in Suches. But, like Charlie, many of his family members were. As a student of local history, Matt has gained an appreciation for the role that kinship connections play in the community. He has found that local lineage and family histories help to anchor community members like him.

> So that's my part of how I am here. That's something I hold on to, because that's how I can say this is my culture too. That's what ties me in....So, it's neat how you can see how everyone's related. I can [track a person's lineage] with just about anyone in this school.

Charlie, Jim, Hank, and Matt have all lived in the community for a different number of years, still these participants all referred to family and kinship as important to the school and community. Family connections with school and community range from past to present involvement that can span several generations. The importance placed on family connections in the community and the school may provide the framework that allows members to think about other members in the community and the school as members of a "family."

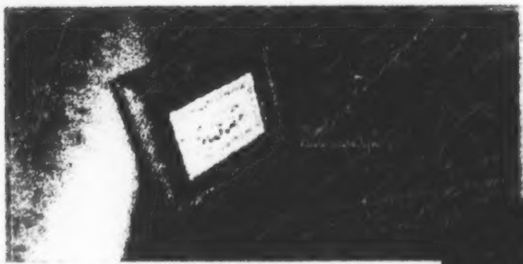
Theme: Kinship-Like Connections. Going to school in Suches can mean attending the same school for 13 years. Although enrollment withdrawal from the school happens, it is typically low (two per cent of students withdrew during the 1996-1997 school year, [Woody Gap School, 1998]) and there are no seasonal jobs in the area to attract transient workers and their families. This means that a student will be with the same small group of peers on a daily basis for years. Dividing the average number of students for the school in the last ten years (100) by 13 grades translates into an average of seven to eight students per grade. Sometimes these numbers are even lower. Such low numbers in a small building makes for an intimate setting. Charlie, Hank, Ryan, Matt, Joy, and Henry all talked about students having connections with each other in the school and the community that are kinship-like (see Figure 17).

Henry has lived in Suches all his life. The only school he has ever attended is Woody Gap School. As a result, he is a friend with school peers he met as a preschooler

> ...You know, you're around people for so long, like me and [my friend]. We've gone to school here since kindergarten, and before kindergarten. You know, I think at a bigger school you have friends like that, but it's not like you are a big family.

Charlie, too, has developed lifelong associations with non-kin community members, friendships first formed in school: "I'm still very close to many of them, through e-mail, through the phone, I still see a lot of them." Charlie and the friends she is referring to came to know a great deal about each other's lives. In fact, these associations formed in the school were so close that members tended to monitor each other's activities in the school and the community with a protective air

> And when you go to a school like this, you know everything about everybody, which is not always good....You know just about everything that you would want to know or don't want to know. I can remember dating in high school. You didn't



Picture. "Old Friends Are Like Heirlooms, Always to be Treasured." This picture symbolizes how many of my closest, life-long friends are people I have known for most of my life. At Woody Gap, everyone knew everyone, and most of us grew up very close. This picture was actually given to me recently by a friend I have known since elementary school.

Friends of a feather stay together. These folks have different abilities, but still have classes together, still "run" together (hunt. fish. socialize). And learn from each other. (Photograph has been blurred to protect identity of subjects.)

Students appreciate the opportunity to socialize with different age groups. The students feel like a family after being in the same school for 12 years.

(Mental Photograph)

We were down in the garden; we are building a garden for our local studies [class] and there were a bunch of kids down there. And, [an older high schooler] was sitting on the ground, propped up against a log like this, and he had a couple of kindergartners sitting around him, sitting and talking with him, you know. I saw this before, before I started doing this study for you. I just saw it on my own and said, "Gee, that's kind of funny." That is something about around here, connection between the young and the old as far as students and elders in the community and little kids at school, big kids at school... (Mental Photograph)

Figure 17. Kinship-Like Connections Collage.

> really...I didn't date the boys here very much....The boys here would always be very...almost protective...They would want to know who it is...where...would have to meet them almost like a brother or a cousin would, so that was very interesting....One of the reasons [we rarely dated each other] is because you do become so close.

This closeness is still evident in the school. As a student currently enrolled in the school, Matt also feels protective toward his peers. Much like a sibling, he alerts them to others' characteristics or traits that may be unacceptable to the group. For example, Matt sought out and counseled a friend when he felt it his duty to protect a her from someone who came from the outside and whom Matt did not trust. Like an older brother, Matt felt a responsibility to protect his classmate.

From the perspective of a teacher, Hank has noticed a kinship-like closeness between students. Just as members within a family accept one another even if each have different interests and talents, Hank has observed that students' school friendships are not limited by academic abilities or status. He knows of students who have taken up different interests, gone in different directions, yet remained close to their friends. He partly attributes this to what he sees as the absence of school cliques and social pretenses: Attending school in an isolated setting with a small group of people allows "the real person [to] come through, instead of having all these students coming through with all these guises."

Another teacher, Ryan, has only lived in the Suches community for three years, but like Hank he sees connections between students that seem to be long lasting and family-like. He has observed these connections not only within immediate peer groups, but across grade levels, as well. He has observed a "sense of kinship" between younger and older students, bonds that formed at an early age through regular interactions. For his photoessay, he photographed a gathering of the student body for the school's yearbook signing as an example of how this sense of kinship can spontaneously manifest in the school. He noted, "It was almost as if it just happens automatically, that yearbook signing thing, because we never really say, 'Okay, it's official yearbook signing.' They just automatically...it's one of those things that happen." Ryan's photographs of the yearbook signing show young students interacting with older high school students.

Matt, an upper classman who has friends younger than he, provides another example of the “family-like” interaction between younger and older students:

> I've got friends in the fourth and fifth grade....Somebody asked me [about one friend], "Are you twins?" And I said, "Are you serious? We aren't even related and I am three years older than him." And the guy was like, "You're a freshman and you're a senior? What's a senior hanging out with a freshman for?" And I was like, "He's my best friend, man."

Matt is schooled in a small intimate setting where he feels comfortable befriending younger students. Because these are students he regularly sees in the community, in the school hall, during school activities, and on the school grounds, he has opportunities to come to know younger students, and he is able to do this without the criticism from his peers.

Another student participant, Joy has also observed a connection between young and older students. She provided an example of this when she described a photograph she took at the school's baccalaureate ceremony for her photoessay:

> Now, this picture shows how involved the little kids are with [the ceremony]. I mean they are not even part of anybody, they're not a sister or brother or anything to any of the graduates, yet they come, because we are so close to them. We know everybody.

It is likely that because of the intimate setting of a small K-12 school, friendships and interactions with younger, non-related students are more acceptable at Woody Gap School than they would be in other larger schools. Chances are that at a larger school these friendships would never have developed in the first place.

Because the school is small and intimate, literally without many places to hide, students end up spending large amounts of time together. These factors create opportunities for friendships to build while providing little room to retreat from each other. Matt discussed this condition when he talked about another student who had been an important part of his support system while he traversed more trying times. Matt explained that although this student was important to him, " She's been my girlfriend, my best friend, my mother for the past two years; she's been all that to me," they were no longer a couple and were now just friends. Remaining friends with peers may be a necessary condition of going to a small school. Matt pointed out that "when you make an enemy, you've got to make up. If you don't, then you by yourself [sic]. That's why there's no cliques much....That's why it's hard to stay enemies."

Like Matt, Henry recognizes that the smallness of the school literally leaves little place to hide from anyone who would not be your friend.

> It's real hard to fight with people here, know what I mean? Like if you get in a fight with somebody, the next hour, you know, you're talking to them again, because you have no choice. You can't get away from them, so you're stuck with them and you're miserable.

As testimony to this, teacher Ryan stated that he has never witnessed a fight during his three years at the school. In addition to Matt's and Ryan's theory that a student needs to keep the peace because he or she is in constant contact with the other, he wondered if it is also due to the openness and communication among students that keeps them from "getting to the point where they have to go to blows.... I'm sure they argue or whatever, [but] it never escalates to that point [of fighting]." Perhaps the intimacy of the setting requires students to learn skills or rules to function socially at the school. (Some of the "rules for conduct" in the school community and community at large will be discussed later in this chapter.)

Although the smallness of the school affords students of all grade levels opportunities to interact with each other regularly, interactions across grade levels have decreased in the past few years as the school has reorganized. Hank reminisced about a past tradition that symbolizes the more frequent interactions among ages.

> Well, I kind of liked it the way it used to be. I can remember days where, the chair brigade, we used to have...the old wooden chairs that sat in the media center had to go down to high school graduation on the field. And we had this long chain of a hundred kids with kids. And you would see someone as large as [a mature high schooler] hand a chair down to maybe [a very young student]. And then, maybe [this young student] would hand it over to...it would just go on down, because they had to send a couple of hundred chairs down there. Even the wooden chairs are gone [now]. It was great.

Hank provided the example of the chair brigade to represent interactions he has observed across the grade levels before the designated schools within Woody Gap separated students into divisions of elementary, middle, and high schools. Even though Hank laments the change of the school's organization because it meant fewer interactions between younger and older students, he recognizes that there is a flip side to this reform that now stratifies students further into groups. Hank talked more about what school divisions has meant to the school in terms of across grade interactions:

> Before then, you see, they didn't have their own little separate awards day....It was just for the whole school, and it centered on the whole school. So, at least now, the elementary and the middle school's individual students are being recognized.

Hank feels that within the smaller schools there is now a greater effort made to celebrate the individual student's accomplishments.

Students at Woody Gap attend school along with their brothers, sisters, cousins, even aunts and uncles. Among these relatives are also nonrelated students who build long-lasting relationships with each other. Relationships may be between peers and between younger and older students. Like being in a "big family," kinship-like connections between students may be continued out in community settings and after graduation.

Theme: Outsiders and Rules for Conduct. Some participants liken the experience of going to Woody Gap School to being in a big family. In traditional families there are usually rules set in place so that members can get along and work be done. Rules for getting along and completing tasks are also evident in the larger community of Woody Gap School and the Suches community. Some of these rules have been in place for a long time; some are explicit and some are implied. The rules for acceptance in the community may be difficult for the newcomer to decipher particularly when the community is a long-standing one that is geographically isolated. In this study, although no participant created photographs as referents to rules for conduct in the community, most did talk about getting along in the community and its school and how someone new to the community, an "outsider," may or may not fit within the social structure that is a result of these rules (see Figure 18).

As someone from the "outside" who has lived in Suches for many years, Jim is a community member and volunteer who has observed some of the tensions and dynamics between native and nonnative residents in the community setting.

> There's the issue of people moving into the county as opposed to the natives. And there is a certain break there. If you've got Harold and his family's lived here for 487 million years [and] if he's not particularly sensitive to the recently arrived residents, then newcomers are somewhat disenfranchised....There is a "last settler" syndrome here, too. And that causes problems...in the community at-large.

Jim has observed this tension in the school setting, as well:

> There are a couple of people spread out amongst the school building down there that just absolutely hate the idea of anything new happening. There are a couple of people down there that are just incredibly provincial and would isolate, reisolate, this community, if they could.

As someone from the "outside" who has lived in the community for many years, Jim provided personal examples of how the community's code impacts its residents. An example he shared is the tension created when it became evident to the community that

It seems…if you are honest about the whole thing. If you are fairly good with people, then everybody will side with you. You do your job, of course, and everybody sees that you are doing your job. I haven't had any problem with that in the community at all.

I would still consider myself an outsider, because I wasn't born and raised here. I don't have family here.

I don't really fear the community. Now that I have a little bit of clout here, folks would at least listen to my side, as opposed to lumping it as an outsider.

The residence requirements for around here pretty much run into multiple generations.

Well, I've learned that you need to be respectful and sometimes, it's best to hold your tongue....I mean, there's the wrong time and the right time to express your opinions.

There's the issue of people moving into the county as opposed to the natives. And there is a certain break there. If you've got Harold and his family's lived here for 487 million years [and] if he's not particularly sensitive to the recently arrived residents, then newcomers are somewhat disenfranchised.

Either [outsiders] do not make the kind of commitment that exposes their values, or they come in here and don't get involved with the community at all, and in some cases, they

I think people pretty much take [newcomers] for their attitudes and how they are, how they present themselves.

You know that you don't really talk about subjects like that, so, it's not like you hide them, but you don't joke about them and sit there and use slang words to talk about them.

There's some people who come in here with realistic attitudes, and they fit well. People who have fairy tales and fantasies, they don't.

There is a "last settler" syndrome here, too. And that causes problems at school and in the community at-large.

Figure 18. Outsiders and Rules for Conduct Collage.

his family's religious creed was different from the majority of church goers in the area: "We are Episcopalians, for god's sake, living right in the middle of Suches for a long, long time. And there are a lot of people who do not agree with the way we think of things." Over the years, Jim has found that by demonstrating one's values to the community, by being explicit about one's values and beliefs in a way that is agreeable to the community, one is more likely to be accepted into the community by its members. But acceptance may not be indiscriminate. Sometimes, the differences between value systems are not completely reconciled, "The way we practice the Christian faith is going to be looked at by a lot of people around here as foreign, and we are going to be set apart in some sense because of that." Jim and his wife have demonstrated their values by residing in the community for a number of years, teaching school, participating in community and school activities, and working as volunteers with community organizations. Although their religious practices may not be in keeping with the majority of the community's members, they have established themselves in the community as productive members whose contributions are valued by their neighbors and the organizations they serve. Jim described a mental photograph he had of a group of community members, of various religious faiths, riding together in a pickup truck and enjoying each other's company. To Jim this was a symbol of the coming together of members in the community: for all their differences, Jim and his wife has found that in his community, members, both insiders and outsiders, can work and socialize together in positive and productive ways.

As a self-proclaimed outsider in the community endeavoring to understand how to be an insider, Ryan has found himself grappling with particular aspects of the community's value system. While not wishing to compromise his own values, he struggles to find acceptable ways to make a difference in his community and his students' lives and longs to help shift some of those community values he perceives as contrary. As a teacher, Ryan feels that one important shift for his students and the community to make is toward a more tolerant view of diverse cultures. Ryan sees some of his students and community members as having a limited view of the world at large and a lack of tolerance for those who are different from them. Embedded within Ryan's frustration with some of the school and community values he has witnessed is his realization that some community members insist that he, as an "outsider," co-op particular stances and demonstrate his values in a way that is the least disruptive to the community's norms. As someone from the outside, Ryan feels a pressure to agree with the status quo and to refrain from speaking openly about aspects of the community's code with which he is in conflict. He feels silenced by this pressure, while acknowledging that this pressure from members is a reaction to what they perceive as a threat to their way of life. "If I was to come in here and try to change something, whether it was their opinions or be their traditions…they are violated by that." His hope is to help his students consider other cultural perspectives and to increase their levels of tolerance, "We could stop the perpetuation of the cycle. You know, maybe if I could make a difference with the kids." Through modeling tolerance and providing exposure to other cultures, Ryan's goal is to help his students find similarities among other cultures and themselves and to embrace cultural differences as a positive aspect of society.

Unlike Ryan, Hank has lived in his community for a number of years. Yet, even though he is a long-standing teacher, parent, and community volunteer, Hank still considers himself to be somewhat of an outsider because he was not born in the area and does not have extended family there. Reflecting back on when he first arrived in the area, Hank thinks that his association with the school gave him a "clean slate" in the eyes of the community. According to Hank, a newcomer can add or subtract from his or her slate. But, if the rules are broken too many times, then "they'll run you out of here." Like Jim, Hank has observed it to be necessary for the community to see your values, "It seems…if you are honest about the whole thing…. You do your job, of course, and everybody sees that you are doing your job." Over the years, Hank has continued to add to his slate. Now, although he does not see himself as a insider, he does feel assured that he has maintained the necessary conduct that entitles him to a consideration that an "outsider" might not receive, "I don't really fear the community. Now that I have a little bit of clout here, folks would at least listen to my side, as opposed to lumping it as an outsider."

As part of the discussion about insiders and outsiders, Hank talked about a past group of students enrolled in Woody Gap. He compared them with the current group of involved, active high school students. These former students were "outsiders," and Hank felt that these particular students "were just bent on being as counterproductive as they possibly could. And, you know, they mainly kept it to themselves. It just wasn't a real rewarding feeling like it is here." In Hank's view, it was not the alone fact that these students were outsiders that made their presence an uncomfortable fit for him and others:

> Alice: So, do you think that those outsiders had come in with a different approach…I mean…do you think it's possible for new kids from the outside to come in and be accepted as a community member?
>
> Hank: Easily. I think everybody, all the kids here, will accept a friend; that's just universal, over the 13, 14 years [I've been here], is that they are really willing to accept any kind of folks.

When this question of tolerance is extended to students from ethnically diverse cultures, Hank is not as certain.

> Alice: Do you know of any [particular type of] students who have gone here?
>
> Hank: There haven't been any [particular type of] students. We've had a [another particular type of student] or two. And we have even graduated someone who was at least half [another particular type], maybe three-fourths. Although, she wasn't living with a [another particular type of] family. She was living with [another particular type of] relatives here. Um, which went over well. There was one family that was kind of different. They kind of ran them out of here. Now, a [particular type of student], it would be something different. There is a lot of -- here. But, I think it would be…I would love to see it. I would love to see what would happen. I really don't think it would be…it would depend on the family. If the family was a good family and everything, I think they would be accepted.

> Hank is encouraged by the idea of people from more diverse settings moving into the area. He points out that transplants from Atlanta are moving into the area, and he hopes that they will bring values that include a more tolerant perspective toward minorities and other dissimilar groups and that will influence the community's code of conduct.

Unlike Jim, Ryan, and Hank, Charlie was born and raised in the community. As a student, she found an acceptance within her peer group that did not always extend to every student who came from the "outside."

> Every once in awhile, usually they [outsiders] would come in and everything would be fine. But every once in awhile, you'd have a problem. If they come in here and, for some reason, people wanted to come in and change things. "Well we didn't do it that way. Why do you do it that way here? You know, well, that's just so backward. I can't believe that you do it that way here." And I always noticed it was the same thing. If they tried to mold in with...tried to get along with the group....But, for the most part, we all formed as a group together....Unless, it was like I said, they came in with this attitude like we were just...you know...I think it was just the fact of being a little harder to get along with. I saw it many of times to where they were not as accepted.

It may be that Charlie and her peers had a working knowledge of the rules for being in the group to which "outsiders" were either not privy. Or as Hank observed, some newcomers were resistant to the community's code of conduct. This created a "we-they" tension not resolved unless new students either learned the rules or left. Despite the tension created when some outsiders resisted the expectations of their peers and school, Charlie maintains that most of the school's students were comfortable with each other. She echoes Hank's assertion that students at the school were accepting of each other:

> But, for the most part, we all formed as a group together. And, I think that's sort of neat, because we did have those that were more, you know, country, and those that had a little more experience outside of here. But as we all came together in

> different groups, we sort of added…it sort of added to the pot. And it was really neat.
>
> Alice: So, you were able to accept each other's differences?
>
> Charlie: Oh, yeah, we were.

Like Hank, Mary is another teacher who doesn't feel that the condition of being an outsider is enough reason to cause a student to be excluded from his or her peers or the community. Mary explains that being of birth in the community is an advantage, not of privilege, but of being privy to knowledge that provides a context for the community's social structures and their navigation. When you have been in the community all of your life, you know what is expected and what to expect.

> Alice: …Do you think that it's difficult for children to come in to the school and become acclimated to the area or what the tension is between being an insider and being an outsider?
>
> Mary: I don't really think that there is that much to do with it. Of course, if you are born here, you're a native. And if you have families that have been here for three, four, five generations, you know there's just a difference in that part, But as far as the students, no, I think people pretty much take them for their attitudes and how they are, how they present themselves. There are a lot of people who come in who fit well, because they are not disillusioned. A lot of people can't fit in well when they get here, because they can't go to the store everyday or they can't have, you know, pet care. Or they don't know how to deal with a possum on their back porch. You know?…So, they want to come here, but they want all of the conveniences. Those are the people that have problems adjusting, and then they want to come in here and try to change everything, and make this into a town.

Mary's contention is that when outsiders have unrealistic expectations and try to make the community like the one they left, they defeat their initial purpose in moving to the community.

Although he has family in the area, Matt has lived and attended school in other communities and is aware of the difficulties a new student may encounter when first entering the community through the school. For example, he has observed that it can be difficult for a new student to come into the school and develop lifelong friendships. Part of this difficulty may be due to the gap in a student's knowledge about the community's code of conduct. Matt has found that within the community there are rules for conduct that an outsider may need to learn if he or she is striving to be accepted. Matt compared his experiences interacting with community members and school friends in Atlanta with his experiences in his new community. He found that the rules demand a particular way of acting.

> Something it took me years to learn, and when I first would go to someone's house, people would be like, "Man, who is this guy? Who does he think he is?" You see, people up here are really good at acting one way in front of adults and acting another way behind their backs. And, the way I was brought up is keep it real all the time. But that's not the way it is up here. But if you are a person like [a friend of Matt's] who doesn't do anything and keep it real in front of everyone- and you can, because your if real self is something everyone loves then, then it's easy.

Matt has discovered a way to be "real" with one's peers in a way that is also in alignment with the values of the community. Matt has chosen to adhere to this model, though not all of his peers make this decision. They conduct themselves in accordance with the code when in front of the community, but not when out of sight of it. Matt has found that an aspect of the code is useful for him in the community and in the larger world:

> Matt: Well, I've learned that you need to be respectful and sometimes, it's best to hold your tongue. And that's...I guess...yeah, that works up here, but what about elsewhere? Is that something that's useful elsewhere? I find that it is, sometimes-- to be able to just keep your mouth shut when you feel like opening it, which I do often.

Matt's considers this accomplishment of restraint necessary for to navigating within the community and earning his membership. Rather than view this process as a form of censure or a demand for conformity, Matt finds it to be a useful skill that is applicable to settings outside of the local community. He still feels that he can voice his opinion, but has since learned that community rules require him to consider that there is a time and place for doing so: "I know there is always a way to express everything. It's just that you've got to know when and how."

Matt himself conveys the community's rules for conduct by advising his peers and instructing younger students on how to find their own way within the school community. He encourages them to demonstrate the same type of restraint he has learned. For example, Matt encourages a younger student to be "real" in a way that the community values, by doing what is considered to be right, staying out of trouble, and demonstrating restraint. Matt looks to himself as a positive example of someone who has been able to change and adapt in a new community setting.

Within the school community and the community at large, students, teachers, and community members find that there are rules for conduct to assist members in getting along and in completing tasks. Sometimes, these rules are at odds with newcomers or "outsiders" whose values are not aligned with the community's or who do not understand them. One way for an outsider to gain entry into the community is by demonstrating his or her values for all to see. Sometimes, when outsiders try to resist the rules, members of the community may feel threatened by these gestures, or in some cases, members may welcome change as a desirable influence on the community's rules for conduct.

Theme: Exclusivity. Particular rules for conduct in the community may be co-opted by some so intensely, that as a group, members decide to exclude others. In addition, the isolation of the school and community settings may mean fewer opportunities for members to interact with others and, so, some members feel that they are excluded from those who would be sources of support and provide dialogue. Hank and Ryan provided examples exclusivity from both perspectives (see Figure 19).

My teaching philosophy often alienates me. I am left to hide in the shadows, apart from the whole, so that I may let students experience a taste of diversity. Why?? Am I doing anything wrong?

I don't have a department, so, no one to talk shop with, and so, uh, that's... you just have to do it yourself.

Having coached one year and gone to [play] a Jewish school. I remember our students on the way out... and we got beat... but, I remember some of our students singing *Onward, Christian Soldiers* as they were leaving the dressing room. And, what was amazing was I was telling the kids that this is unheard of and they should stop, but it was condoned by an adult chaperone, a minister's wife, who just smiled about the whole thing and just thought that it was, you know, appropriate.

I think that the people moving up here into the area, say, from Atlanta are wiser, and they are certainly less prejudiced then the folks who have been here a long time. So, we are in a big transition period, which is probably not going to stop.

It wouldn't be so bad if I could even have somebody in my department, another teacher who was on the same, you know plan, had the same teaching phi same... but, you know, I'm the

You know, [my wife] and [another teacher]they go at it hammer and tongs at the lunch table down there over very, very real differences in religious beliefs and practices and the extent to which those beliefs that each of them hold should be imposed on every body else or no body else or what.

Jim: There are people around here that would want you to feel that way. And it's this business of some people to say, "I believe this way because it's right, and by god, it's right for everybody."

Photo Erased

Some refuse to recognize the educational value in teaching others about individuals different from themselves. (Photo Erased)

So, there's been a sudden change in the number of males here, and we've got some good males, real good people. A lot of male bonding goes on, say, at the lunch table (both laugh). What it boils down to, is that we have some real good people. And, we've been lucky to have the folks me here, I think. That's one of the reasons why

Yeah, a Black student would have a terrible time here. A Jewish student would have a tough time, particularly if he were conservative.

Figure 19. Exclusivity Collage.

Members within the community have a common set of rules for conduct that are reinforced through interactions in the school and activities in the community. Demonstrations of shared values may signal to others a bond so strong that it may be exclusive of others. Hank described an experience of exclusivity that occurred while he was a coach at an away basketball game at a [particular faith] school. As they were leaving the court, his players sang Onward Christian Soldiers. This demonstration earned the explicit approval of a community adult chaperone and Hank's disapproval:

> What was amazing was I was telling the kids that this is unheard of and they should stop, but it was condoned by an adult chaperone, a minister's wife, who just smiled about the whole thing and just thought that it was, you know, appropriate.

His players' seeming intolerance of the beliefs of others disturbed Hank. He was further disturbed when an adult community member condoned the team's action. Her approval may have served to reinforce this action as an acceptable rule for community conduct.

Students singing at the basketball game signaled a strong bond between students in such a way that excluded others. Individual members within the community may also feel excluded when they are unable to share the bond held between members because they are resistant to the rule of conduct that bonds members together. As a newcomer and teacher in the school, Ryan has felt, at times, isolated and outside of the community because of his teaching philosophy. He created a photograph for photoessay that represents his feelings of exclusion. He talked about why he staged it the way he did.

> This [photograph] reflects me, because I feel so alienated about what I am trying to do here. And, here's everybody in the entire school out here [in the yard], and I'm left by myself in the shadow with all of these people in the sunshine, you know. I like the way that [picture] turned out. That really helped.

Sometimes members of the community can also feel excluded from others because they are in isolated settings. Part of Ryan's isolation may come from teaching in a small school without the benefit of a peer group with common teaching philosophies.

Alice: Have you felt this way pretty much since you've been here?

Ryan: Yeah, and it wouldn't be so bad…if I could even have somebody in my department, even another English teacher who was on the same, you know, plan, had the same teaching philosophy, same…but, you know, I'm the only one.

Alice: So, do you think that being small has left you in isolation?

Ryan: Absolutely, yes. Yeah, it's a disadvantage for me.

Like Ryan, Hank has also felt isolated in his job because for a long time he did not have male peers with whom he could interact. Hank sees the recent influx of male teachers into the school as having a positive impact on the school and on him. This recent change is providing Hank with what he sees as a group of associates to whom he can turn as he troubles his roles as a teacher and community member. Ultimately, he feels optimistic about school and the positive changes it is undergoing; it is where he wants to be: "What it boils down to, is that we have some real good people, and, we've been lucky to have the folks that we do. It's certainly kept me here, I think."

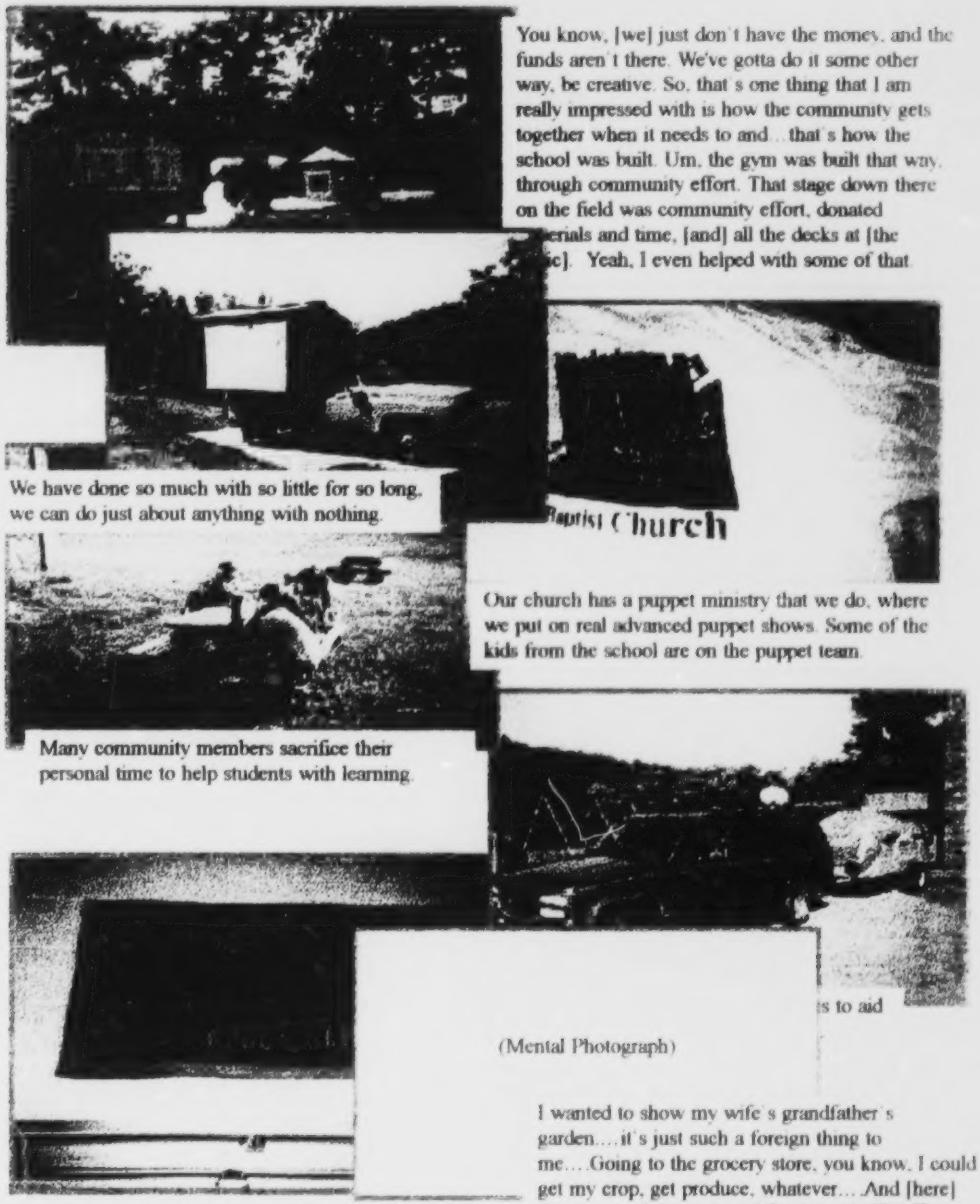
Hank and Ryan have provided examples of exclusivity in their community. Some members are bonded together so closely around a particular rule for conduct that they choose to exclude those who do not share that bond. Sometimes, members in the community may be excluded when they do not share a bond with the group because they may resist some aspect of the community's rules for conduct. Sometimes, members in the community may feel excluded when they do not have opportunities to participate in a larger conversation that could provide support and encouragement for those who feel isolated and disconnected from the community and world at large. Specific members have voiced that they feel less isolated when they have peers to turn to for support. Positive changes in the community and school that create mechanisms of support are important to some members who continue to work in the school and live in the community.

Theme: Involvement in the Community. Just as the teachers in the above discussion have voiced that they need peers to turn to for support, the first White settlers in Suches who had to face great difficulties in a geographically isolated area depended on their neighbors for support. As individuals, each settler needed a pioneer spirit to thrive: "[Settlers in Suches were] tough, independent people making a tough living on the little subsistence farms that the mountains and rocks would allow-supplemented by hunting" Miller, 2000, p. 9). Although these settlers were independent, they still had to rely on their neighbors to help them with many tasks that required immediate attention or collective strength. Churches were often the organizing bodies for such endeavors. To be shunned or turned out by a church could mean disaster for the family counting on its help. It was the custom for men imprisoned for low crimes such as moonshining to be released to tend to his seasonal chores. If he was well liked by the community or if they took pity on his family, members helped him finish those critical chores before his leave was up and he had to return to jail. As the cause of education was championed in the mountains and hollows, members of the community pitched in and organized schools in churches and community buildings. Neighbors needed to help each other then, and that tendency to "pitch in" has persevered today.

Since the school is the center of the community, much of the community's involvement is here. As discussed in Chapter 4, community members have sought for the last sixty years to provide adequate education facilities for its school children. While discussing the relationship between Woody Gap School and its community, participants Ryan and Henry talked specifically about community involvement with the school and what it means for the school and community relationship (see Figure 20). Later, under Question 2, I present how community involvement manifests in school-community activities and traditions and community support of the school.

As a newcomer in the area, Ryan has a great appreciation for the community's work ethic and self-sufficiency. He has found that these traits are important for maintenance and enhancement of the school and other community organizations. For example, a mental photograph Ryan described is one of his father-in-law's garden. This represents for Ryan the self-reliance of residents and their traditional methods for

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."
–Margaret Mead



You know, [we] just don't have the money, and the funds aren't there. We've gotta do it some other way, be creative. So, that's one thing that I am really impressed with is how the community gets together when it needs to and...that's how the school was built. Um, the gym was built that way, through community effort. That stage down there on the field was community effort, donated erials and time, [and] all the decks at [the c]. Yeah, I even helped with some of that.

We have done so much with so little for so long, we can do just about anything with nothing.

Our church has a puppet ministry that we do, where we put on real advanced puppet shows. Some of the kids from the school are on the puppet team.

Many community members sacrifice their personal time to help students with learning.

s to aid

(Mental Photograph)

I wanted to show my wife's grandfather's garden....it's just such a foreign thing to me....Going to the grocery store, you know, I could get my crop, get produce, whatever....And [here] they create their own, and they're so self-sufficient. They don't need anything. That's the key, I think, that I wanted to get across: the self-sufficiency, that they use the land to live, and they know so much about it. Just because it's been handed down from generation to generation-nothing's changed. (Mental Photograph)

I took a picture of the FAA banner because that represents community, the kids from the school get involved with community. We are just getting started.

Figure 20. Involvement in the Community Collage.

maintaining independence through the years, as members pass on an appreciation for self-sufficiency and "making do" from one generation to another. Ryan chose to represent self-sufficiency and making do with a photograph of the school truck.

> You know, we have to improvise and do with whatever we have. That truck's been here forever, and we just had to use it, you know. Um, because we don't have a lot of monies, you know, that big schools do. [We] just don't have the money, and the funds aren't there. We've gotta do it some other way, be creative.

Along with the improvisational spirit of members of the school and community Ryan has observed, he admires their hard work and commitment. One of Ryan's photographs is of a teacher's car loaded down with recycling. He feels that this is "a good symbol of work" in the community. Coming from a large city to a small community, Ryan is amazed that "everyone...lends a helping hand," working together on projects such as the school gymnasium and outdoor stage. Ryan admires and appreciates the involvement of the community in school and local projects; he is also a participant in these activities. "Yeah, I even helped with some of that. I'm not a carpenter, but I did some of it...whatever I could." Ryan is proud of the community contributions to the school.

As a student and lifelong resident in the community, Henry is aware and appreciative of the support that adults in the community provide for younger members; he also recognizes the positive impact students can have on their elders' experiences in the community, as well.

> I think the kids [have] a big impact on the community. You know, getting out in the community and helping. Like when we go on the field trips to the old home sites. A lot of the older folks, they really like doing stuff with the kids. I think that they enjoy it, and it makes the community more enjoyable. They have more things to do. It helps...grow together, you know?

Henry has participated in classroom activities and church programs that have taken him and his peers out to work with elders and others in the community. He sees a mutual benefit in having several generations involved in community activities: when young people are involved in these activities, older members in the community are more apt to participate. There is a mutual benefit of having several generations together, "growing together" as they learn from each other.

Involvement in the community by members often includes interactions with the school, its center. The spirit of community involvement may come from earlier days when the members of this geographically isolated community were extremely dependent on one another to assist them in completing tasks required to have successful homesteads and farms. Throughout its 60-year history, the school has benefited from the efforts of the community's members and their involvement in acquiring resources and completing projects to meeting its needs and wants.

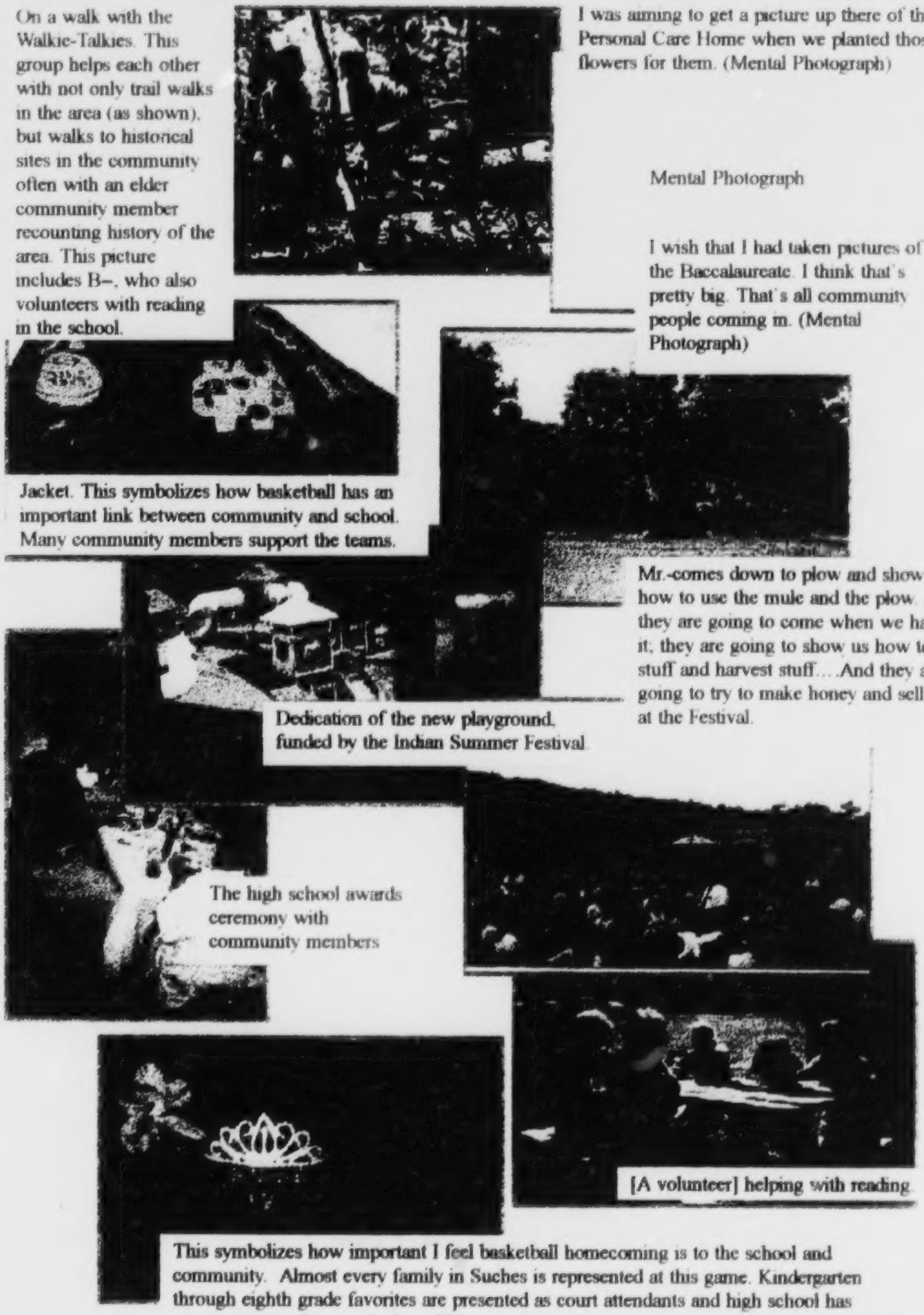
Summary. Five common themes were organized and presented for this section of the chapter. Themes were organized under the first research question, "How do educators, students, and community members conceptualize the relationship between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" The themes were Kinship Connections, Kinship-Like Connections, Outsiders and Rules for Conduct, Exclusivity, and Involvement in the Community. Each theme was accompanied by a figure that is a collage of organized participant-produced photographs, their captions (photofeedback), and some transcribed oral responses from the photointerviews. The first common theme, Kinship Connections, was a discussion of participants' references to and examples of family involvement with school and community. The second theme, Kinship-Like Connections, presented participants' perceptions of the family-like connections between peers, young and older students, and the settings in which these connections are made and played out. The next theme, Outsiders and Rules for Conduct, was a discussion of the expectations of the members of the community, specifically, the rules for conduct in the community and how these expectations affect newcomers to the community and school settings. The fourth theme, Exclusivity, presented some participants' perspectives of the exclusion of others by community members who strongly adhere to the rules for conduct in the community and when they feel excluded as a result of working in an isolated setting. The last theme, Involvement in the Community, was a discussion of some participants' examples and references to a work ethic and community spirit that has promoted member involvement in community and school efforts. These five themes are the results of a cross-case analysis of the private photoessays of the study's eight participants organized under the first of the three research questions.

The next section of the chapter is a presentation of three common themes organized under the second research question, "What kinds of interactions do educators, students, and community members have between this small rural school and its surrounding community? This section is a discussion of the types of interactions identified and discussed by participants in their private photoessays. Again, as a means for avoiding the repetition of lengthy data excerpts found in Chapter 5, a collage of organized participant-produced photographs, their captions (photofeedback), and some transcribed oral responses from the photointerviews, has been created and inserted as a figure for each of the three common themes organized under this question.

Question 2: School and Community Interactions

Theme: Community Support of School. Woody Gap School is the only school located in the community of Suches, Georgia. It is the state of Georgia's last remaining k-12 unit, and at the time of this study, its smallest school. The only school in the state to remain officially identified as an "isolated" school, it qualifies for a legislated "sparsity" grant and receives funding from the state to supplement the school's budget so that it may properly educate its students. As the only school in the community, Woody Gap School has constant interactions with the community by way of its support. Charlie, Hank, Henry, and Joy discussed ways that the community supports the school (see Figure 21).

A health care professional and parent who is working and living in the community where she was born, raised, and schooled, Charlie discussed how the school sometimes counts on the community to help its traditions continue. For example, she recalled how, one year, the girls' team basketball game traditionally played on Homecoming night, was



On a walk with the Walkie-Talkies. This group helps each other with not only trail walks in the area (as shown), but walks to historical sites in the community often with an elder community member recounting history of the area. This picture includes B–, who also volunteers with reading in the school.

I was aiming to get a picture up there of the Personal Care Home when we planted those flowers for them. (Mental Photograph)

Mental Photograph

I wish that I had taken pictures of the Baccalaureate. I think that's pretty big. That's all community people coming in. (Mental Photograph)

Jacket. This symbolizes how basketball has an important link between community and school. Many community members support the teams.

Mr.-comes down to plow and show us how to use the mule and the plow. And they are going to come when we harvest it; they are going to show us how to can stuff and harvest stuff.... And they are going to try to make honey and sell that at the Festival.

Dedication of the new playground, funded by the Indian Summer Festival.

The high school awards ceremony with community members

[A volunteer] helping with reading.

This symbolizes how important I feel basketball homecoming is to the school and community. Almost every family in Suches is represented at this game. Kindergarten through eighth grade favorites are presented as court attendants and high school has representatives from each class. This year the varsity girls game was cancelled by the other team. I called around the community and a few of the women alumni played a scrimmage game with them before the boys game.

Figure 21. Community Support of the School Collage.

almost cancelled, until the community stepped in to help. Instead, a group of women living in the community formed a team and played the girls. Some of these women were parents of the players; most were graduates of the school. The school's small enrollment means students who live in the community have fewer opportunities to play sports, so it was important to the school that the game be played, and it was important to community members to help this happen.

Community members also continually lend support to the school by attending its sports events. As one of the few organized sports available at Woody Gap, basketball is the most popular and is the most heavily supported by the community. Charlie created a photograph for her photoessay to point out how important basketball is to the school and how the community supports it.

> Okay, the jacket symbolizes how important basketball is as a link between the community and the school. It's the biggest sport we have here. And, it's...it's....I loved the game then, and I love it now. A lot of community supports it with the kids, and it just sort of brings everybody together.

Henry, a student, also created a photograph of his jacket for his photoessay. He explained its purpose:

> I took a picture of my varsity jacket, because that shows how the community is always involved with our sports activities. They always turn out for the basketball games, tennis matches, and stuff like that. They are always there to support us.
>
> Community members are always there to support us. They will travel to the away games to make sure that we have some fans, you know.

Community support of athletic events is not limited to family and friends of players. Henry knows of community members who will come to games to support the school's players who do not or no longer have children enrolled at the school.

> Alice: Are there community members, who don't have kids at the school, who go?

> Henry: Yeah, a lot of the older folks…I know a guy who lives up the road from me, he always comes to ball games, and his kids are grown, and he is up in his seventies, but he just likes to come, you know, and support the team.

The school's homecoming is held during basketball season. Charlie took a picture of her homecoming queen crown to represent how she considers this event to be an important opportunity for the community to support the school.

> This one is a picture of a crown, which symbolizes how important that I feel Homecoming is. I put [on my caption] almost every family in Suches is represented at this game. It's really neat how it incorporates the whole school.

Another opportunity for the community to support the school is through local organizations such as the Woody Gap Sports Club. Charlie and Hank, a teacher, see this support as an important link between school and community. Charlie pointed out that this club does regular fundraisers for the basketball teams. Hank also described other ways the Sports Club supports the school, efforts that result in interactions between members of the school and community. For example, Hank discussed the recent purchase and installment of new playground equipment at the school.

> We've been needing some new equipment for a few years and it was donated by the Sports Club….The moneys they have [from] the Festival held in the first week in October raises, oh, I don't know, probably six to ten thousand dollars a year. And that essentially supplements our administration funds. Um, this was about three thousand dollars for the playground equipment and it all came from the Sports Club. So, the Sports Club will be giving 450 dollars to every graduating senior this Saturday night. So, that's...they have to use it toward education...

The Woody Gap Sports Club is a booster club that does more than support the athletic department of the school. Besides funding the athletic teams, it donates money to the school to support administrative costs, works to improve facilities like the playground, and, along with the Gaddistown Homemakers Club, promotes academic excellence by way of awarding school scholarships.

Other community volunteer efforts support the school. Community members volunteer at the school as tutors, classroom aides, and substitutes. Volunteers also assist students with school and class projects, bringing their expertise to the campus to share with students. One of the student participants, Joy, described some of these efforts when she talked about her photograph of the school garden.

> Okay that's our garden. Well, we had [a community member] come down to plow and show us how to use the mule and the plow. And they are going to come when we harvest it; they are going to show us how to can stuff and harvest stuff...
>
> Alice: The Indian Summer Festival: I've heard that mentioned quite a bit since I've been here. That's a really big deal.
>
> Joy: It is a big deal. There is like two or three thousand people who show up out in the field. There's everything: quilt shows, boiled peanuts, army guards come, steam engines, ox and mules, cows, pigs, sheep...

Those who bring the steam engines, oxen, mules, etc. are community members who are either recruited or have volunteered on their own to come to the Indian Summer Festival to demonstrate their expertise for students and other visitors to the Festival. Some of these same volunteers come with others to support Old Fashion Day, an annual event held at the school. Charlie spoke about the importance of the community's support of Old-Fashion Day when she talked about the photograph she made of a churn to represent it.

> The churn represents...Old-Fashion Day. Umm, it was just the feeling on that day. You experienced it, I'm sure. With all of the elder people, or I say the elder--some of them were not. But the older people of the community come in, showing and demonstrating these things that kids today have no idea. I mean, I learn something every time I go....

Community members endorse the importance of the school through participation in co-curricular activities like Old Fashion Day. They also support the school through participating in school social activities. For example, community members regularly attend the school's annual Homecoming Ceremony, Awards Banquet, and Baccalaureate Ceremony. Charlie, Hank, and Joy included these forms of support in their discussions about community.

On one occasion, I spoke with Hank about another teacher's thoughts concerning some of the school's activities designed to involve the support of members from the community. She was concerned that by holding school events during the day, community attendance, especially attendance by those community members who didn't currently have any children of their own attending the school, was lower than when they were held at night. I asked Hank what he thought:

> I think that the community has been able to participate less since the Awards Banquet is held during the day. It was always held in the evening, and it was a big turnout, community-wise. More non-related people used to come out for the Awards Banquet. It was a long drawn-out thing, too; it lasted two or three hours, giving out awards....It was a big deal. You had a lot more community people there. And in the last couple of years, we had these luncheons, which some people can't get off work; you know how it is. And [now], it's just centered on the high school....I would probably agree that in dividing it up, you have kind of reduced participation in the community. How to get around that [may be to] have high school, middle school graduation awards banquet the same day.

Although Hank agrees that community involvement since the Awards Banquet is geared toward high school, rather than the whole school, is not as great as it once was. He also sees a benefit in having separate ceremonies for the elementary, middle, and high school. As a parent of an elementary student and a teacher in the high school, he has observed that in having separate awards ceremonies for all three schools, students are now recognized and acknowledged for their accomplishments on a more individualized basis. He suggests that in order to accommodate those who wish to attend more than one ceremony, the school might consider holding all three ceremonies on the same day.

The community interacts with Woody Gap School through various ways. One way is through its support of the school. Types of community support described and discussed by participants include: community support of school traditions, community fundraising and recognition of the school's graduates, regular attendance by community members to school athletic events, and community involvement with school and class projects on campus. These types of support benefit the school by supplying it with resources it may otherwise have to do without and by providing its students with the acknowledgement and encouragement of their community's residents. Support of the school by the community provides opportunities for regular interactions between members of the school and community. Interaction between the school and community also occurs during the observance of school traditions and school activities. During these interactions, the community may provide support to the school or the school may provide support to the community, but most often both the school and the community are supporting each other.

Theme: Activities and Traditions. One way to learn some of the rules for being a member of the community is through the observation of its members as they model and reinforce values that the community has decided are important. One place modeling and reinforcement can occur is at the school as school and community members participate in traditional annual observances and activities (see Figure 22). The school Baccalaureate Ceremony, the Awards Banquet, Homecoming Ceremony, Indian Summer Festival, and Old Fashion Day have already been mentioned as interactions between school and community where the community supports the school. These are activities and traditions mentioned by most of the participants when they talked about school and community interactions. Participants referred to one traditional activity, The Indian Summer Festival, the most often, signifying an important representation of collaboration between school and community. Charlie, Hank, Ryan, Mary, Henry, Jim, and Joy mentioned or described the Indian Summer Festival as an important representation to them of school and

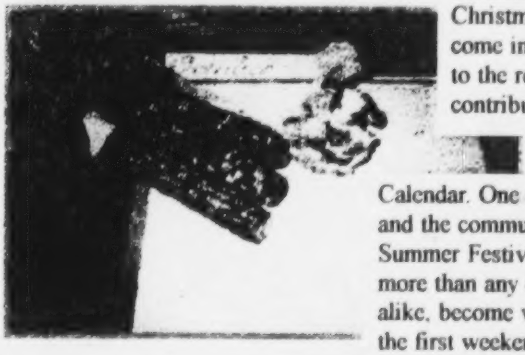
Community members support seniors at Baccalaureate service. Discussing how proud they were of the seniors.

Gathering of School and Community Showing their Concern for School Activities.

Memory for Me. Also a Blessing to be Graduating with Such Wonderful People That I Know Very Well Due to Our Rural Community.

Churn. This symbolizes how important I fe
Old-Fashioned Day is to the students of W
and the community. We really enjoyed this
day when I was in school, now I continue t
enjoy going and observing the activities.
Community members are able to teach and
demonstrate skills that many of our ance
viewed as a way of everyday life. I was
asked last year to demonstrate a booth w
information of early Suches midwives.

Halloween/Christmas. During school events at these holidays, many community members are allowed to observe or participate. Every year at Halloween 3-4 community members are asked to judge the costume contests (I even judged one year since I graduated.) At Christmas, when I was in high school, we had people come in and teach us various Christmas carols to present to the rest of the school. Parents also come in and contribute to holiday parties.



Calendar. One of the biggest events of the year for the school and the community members occurs in October. I feel the Indian Summer Festival pulls the community and the school together more than any other activity. Most people, children and adults alike, become very excited about the festivities involved with the first weekend in October. Many people put in long hours to help this become a success. All proceeds go to the school.

Figure 22. Activities and Traditions Collage.

community interaction. For example, Charlie discussed the photograph she created to represent Indian Summer Festival.

> The reason I took a picture of a calendar with the month of October and the Indian corn is because this symbolizes the Indian Summer Festival. And, that is the first weekend in October. That is such a huge event; the school's and community's link. Everyone gets excited. You can talk to several of the kids in ... I can remember seeing the excitement on their faces. Some of the kids here this year feel what I used to feel when I was in school. The adults, you know, really enjoy it. And all of the proceeds go to the school.

Jim recalls his family being involved with the Indian Summer Festival since around 1982. With his first encounter with it, he recognized the effort the school and community were making together:

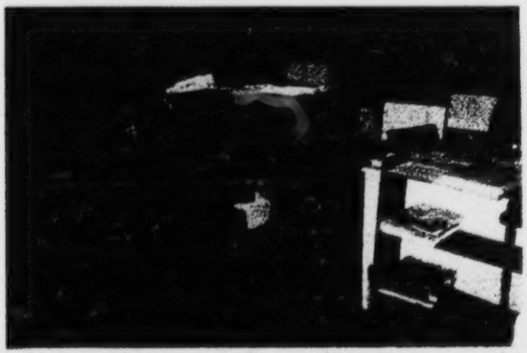
> The first Indian Summer Festival they had was like 23 years ago now, and [my wife] and the kids and I just blundered on to it, didn't have a clue where Suches was or anything. We just happened to be driving around in the mountains. They had about a half a dozen tables just stuck out in the pasture out there. And they were selling funnel cakes and sausage biscuits and used books. And they had some craft items out there and it was to raise money for the basketball program. Because at that point, the county basically turned on the gym lights for the home games and gassed up the bus for away games, and if you wanted any more of these fancy extras like basketballs, uniforms, and officials, stuff like that, you scratched around for yourself.

Traditional celebrations at the school include school and community participants. According to Charlie, Halloween and Christmas are two holidays observed at Woody Gap School that provide opportunities for interactions between the school and its community.

> We still have costume contests here on Halloween. That is so much fun ... And community members, anyone actually, can come to observe and watch or

participate, and, you know, help out. The parents come and have parties with their kids. Halloween is one of the days that we did that. And of course, Christmas. They still have Gift Exchange.... All of the packages go under the tree....And so, the seniors disburse them out, and they have a big get together in the auditorium. I mean, it really, it just pulls everything in, and that's another thing that if the community wanted to come. When I was in high school, we had people come in from the outside and teach us Christmas carols to sing, and the high school would present it to the entire school.

Mary also described Christmas time at the school when she talked about the school piano and how it is for her a symbol for school activities and traditions:



*The Piano. A **baby grand piano in the media center was donated to the school by one of the churches in the community. This piano has been played at graduations of the past before this area was designated as a media center. Members of the community volunteered time practiced and perform Christmas carols around this piano. One of many Christmas community/school traditions at Woody Gap School.***

Alice: I didn't even know that this piano was in there? I never noticed it! What's wrong with me? I'm supposed to be an observer!

Mary: Well, it's piled up with so much junk! It's a beautiful piano.

Alice: I know. I hope it will be used in graduation.

Mary: It's gorgeous. It was a donation from the community, a church. And it's a beautiful piano. It does take up quite a bit of room, but, you know, it's...it has been played at graduations. We've had people from the community come in and

> sing Christmas carols with the students, work with them at Christmas time, and then, all go in to the auditorium and ring around the piano and sing Christmas carols. It was like a big family.

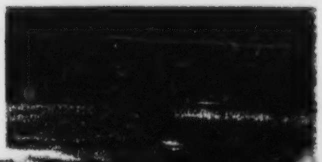
Mary explained that the piano is used not only for Christmas activities, but it is played at school graduations

Members of the school and the community interact when the community is invited to the school setting. Some of the activities and traditions that facilitate interactions described and discussed by participants are the Baccalaureate Ceremony, Awards Banquet, Indian Summer Festival, Old Fashion Day, Halloween, and Christmas. These activities and traditions provide an opportunity for students and community members to interact and to strengthen the ties between school and community.

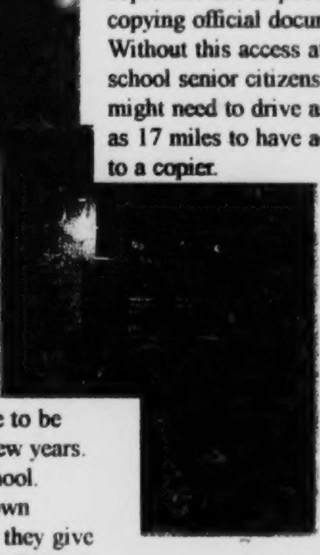
Theme: Mutual Reliance. The interactions between school and community discussed thus far are interactions in the form of community support of the school and interactions in the form of observances of activities and traditions. Another type of interaction discussed and described by participants is one that is symbiotic in nature: a mutual reliance between school and community (see Figures 23 and 24). Jim and Mary listed specific examples of this type of interaction, one in which the school and different segments of the community depend on each other to exchange resources and provide services the other needs and values. Jim described connections between the school and community that are deeply intertwined. He explains this mutual reliance within a discussion about the fire department's connection to the school.

> [The fire department is] going to plumb a line down the bank and put a hydrant, probably on our side of the road. But what will happen then, if anything happens at the school, there's going to be 20,000 gallons available to put a fire out....The other thing is that we were trying to figure out where we are going to get the money to buy the hydrant....The school system is going to buy it. That's a nice mutual round-robin backing-scratching thing there. But that's just another example of school and community cooperation.

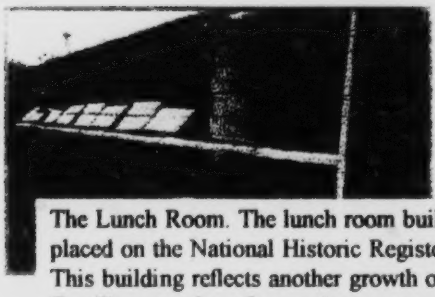
Tennis Courts. The tennis courts serve the community and school. These courts are open and community members may use them. The community was instrumental is helping with this project.



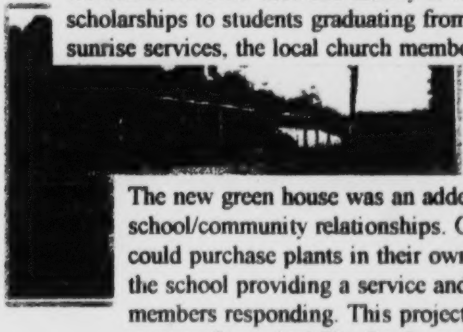
This picture is of the copy machine in the teacher's work room. Elder citizens depend on the school copier for use in photo copying official documents. Without this access at the school senior citizens might need to drive as far as 17 miles to have access to a copier.



The Ball Fields. The school ball field has served the community/school by hosting numerous gatherings such as a back to school softball games and cook outs….The community churches compete in softball games on this field.

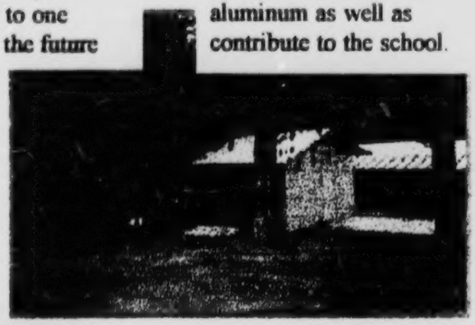


The Lunch Room. The lunch room building will be eligible to be placed on the National Historic Register of Building in a few years. This building reflects another growth of the community/school. Families meet here for reunions on occasion. The Gaddistown Homemakers Club uses this facility to raise funds. In turn, they give scholarships to students graduating from Woody Gap. After Easter sunrise services, the local church members have refreshments.

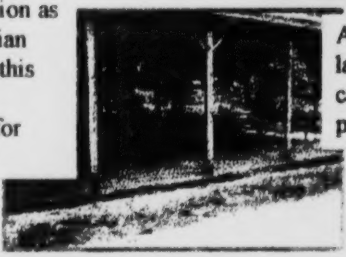


The new green house was an added addition to the school/community relationships. Community members could purchase plants in their own neighborhood. Again, the school providing a service and the community members responding. This project could lead to one source of sustainability for the community in the future

The Recycling Project. The recycling project is a success because of the distance to a recycling point. This service helps the community members dispose of their aluminum as well as contribute to the school.



Pavilion. This pavilion serves as a place for community/school picnics. It is an extension as an outdoor classroom in summer. The branch behind it has a variety of native wildflowers and plants that blossom in the spring which is used as an outdoor study. The teachers and parent volunteers use this pavilion as a place to grill food for the Indian Summer Festival. Money from this project is divided and enables teachers to buy supplementals for their individual classes.



Again, built with mostly community labor, [there are] now areas on campus for cooking, [food] preparation, serving, and eating.

Figure 23. Mutual Reliance Collage, Part 1.

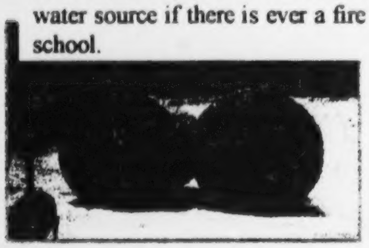
Twenty-three years ago some faculty and parents became aware that on the eve of basketball season there were no uniforms, no basketballs, and no money for them or for referees or anything else for that matter. They borrowed part of Walter Woody's pasture alongside the road and set up some school tables and sold sausage biscuits, funnel cakes, used books, craft items, and whatever else would earn some money for the basketball teams.

Outdoor Stage. This stage serves the community/school at Indian Summer Festival time. Groups perform and the elementary students do a play. Also, graduation exercises have been held here.

The Woody Gap School gymnasium has been an assets to the community in many ways. Numerous organizations have used this faculty to raise funds. One example is the volunteer fire department sponsors square dances in order to purchase equipment to help them provide better service to community members.

The only place in Suches in the winter time for entertainment outside church is the gymnasium. Students and community members meet and show their support of the ball teams. This building shows the growth of the community school in its third decade. Parents and Grandparents of several of the students have played basketball on this same court.

We're going to bury two tanks at the station to improve our supply of clean water. We will draw the water out of the tanks through a hydrant which will be supplied by the school and they will have access to a huge water source if there is ever a fire at the school.



The Woody Gap School was built on community donated land, from community adapted plans, with community donated materials, stands in front of community constructed rec fields, on the edge of which stand community built facilities which are used to enhance the education of the community's children; and the school in turn enriches the community by providing a home for community activities ranging form square dances to organization meeting space to community-wide revivals. Educators like to say that schools cannot exist apart from the community, and it's probably widely true–never more so than in Suches where one can never tell for sure where one aspect of community life ends and another begins.

Figure 24. Mutual Reliance Collage, Part 2.

Under this arrangement, the school is better protected by the fire department, while the fire department secures a hydrant, paid for by the school. Jim provides other examples of the give and take arrangement between the school and fire department.

> The fire department... give[s] a scholarship to one of the graduates every year. It's not much, but it's recognition that we are part of the community. We will have Community Appreciation Dinner every year where the fire department feeds the community instead of the other way around. Sometimes we cook [the dinner] down there, in the school, and then, bring it up here. We've had the thing at the school a bunch of times. But even if we don't have it at the school, we go down there and steal all of the cafeteria chairs and tables for everybody to sit at. It's just another one of the ways when this whole thing interfaces more like teeth on a gear wheel, then just flat, slapped together kind of thing.

The fire department uses the school's creek to supply water for their fire fighting drill and the school's concession stand for training scenarios; many of the department's volunteer fire fighters are members of the Woody Gap Sports Club which built the concession stand for the school. The tractor the school uses for mowing its lawn is housed in the tractor garage of the concession building built by the community through the Sports Club. Jim recalls that a teacher in the school had one of the outlets in the facility rewired so that he could use a kiln for his classes and that another teacher plans to use the building with her class when they need to preserve their garden truck. Jim sees a reciprocal relationship between school and community that encourages its members to take on a variety of roles.

> You know, here we go changing hats. That seems to be the most popular activity in Suches for those people who get involved in things, is standing in front of the shelf in the morning trying to figure out which hat to put on before you leave the house.

The interactions between the school and community Jim describes are mutually dependent on each other for resources and skills. How those resources and skills are dispensed is determined by the needs of the school and the community.

Mary, a teacher at the school, also described interactions between school and community that are examples of a mutual reliance. She listed activities, events, celebrations, and rituals as examples. Mary's photograph of the school copy machine is a representation of an example of a school and community interaction. The machine may be used by senior citizens in the community to make copies of important papers. Mary explained:

> People, especially, elder people, you know, something comes in the mail, and they need a duplicate to send to Social Security or Veteran's Administration. And they get in a panic sort of, so it helps them to have the convenience of the access, because some of them don't drive and they might have to wait for somebody to take them somewhere else to get it copied.

Here the school is providing a service to the community, but when volunteers for the Indian Summer Festival use the machine to produce announcements on the copy machine, the school supports the efforts of the community to produce an event that will ultimately benefit the school. Funds raised at the Festival supply the school help pay for administrative costs, costs like making copies.

Outdoor buildings on the school grounds such as the outdoor stage and the pavilion are used by the school for academic and social functions. The community built these structures and uses them for fundraisers that benefit the school. The recycling center on campus is a community drop-off point for its members. Through human resources provided by the teachers and students who sustain the recycling effort, the school provides a service to the community, while the community provides economic capital for the school by way of aluminum donations converted to cash. Students run the greenhouse on campus as part of their vocational training. Plants are sold to raise funds for the vocational program while providing a service to the community. Community members not only benefit from being able to buy from a convenient location, saving time and fuel, but they also benefit by having plant varieties provided that are hardy and viable for the area.

Another form of reciprocity that encourages school and community interactions is the school's commitment to sharing its facilities with organizations that will bring services, such as karate classes, CPR instruction, and clogging lessons, to campus. Having these activities in the gymnasium provides a benefit of convenience for Woody Gap's students and their families. Mary pointed out that the community also depends on indoor athletic activities, like basketball games, as a source of entertainment for its members.

Other facilities shared by the school with the community are the school's ball fields, tennis courts, playground, and creek. Mary lists activities such as fishing, picnics, community ballgames, and cookouts taking place on the school grounds, likening the activity space to a city park. The community added lights to the ball fields, bought and installed the playground equipment, and built the ballfield bleachers for spectators. An added benefit for the school is that by supporting the community's activity during its off hours, the school can see to it that its students participate in activities in a safe, accessible, and familiar setting.

Mary discussed the installation of the school's tennis courts as a result of a school and community effort and an example of a facility used by the school and the community.

> Well, when [the courts were built,] they didn't have a tennis team. It was there basically for community and school. They've only had a tennis team just the last few years. So it was intended, I think, pretty much, intended to be just a multiple use.

The lunchroom building is also a site for activities that facilitate mutually beneficial school and community interactions. For example, Mary cited the use of it by Gaddistown Homemakers Club to raise funds for scholarships, which are awarded to the school's graduates. Students' families in the community may congregate in the lunchroom for baby showers, wedding receptions, family reunions, or even "household showers." In this way, the school is providing a service while extending its role in the community, and as the community center for the children it educates, the school can continue to maintain an important presence in its community.

The school and community support each other in different ways and with a variety of resources. Often, this mutual reliance on each other provides opportunities for the school and community to interact with each other and to strengthen the relationship between them.

Summary. Three common themes were organized and presented for this section of the chapter. Themes were organized under the second research question, "What kinds of interactions do educators, students, and community members have between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" The themes were Community Support of the School, Activities and Traditions, and Mutual Reliance. Each theme was accompanied by a figure that is a collage of organized participant-produced photographs, their captions (photofeedback), and some transcribed oral responses from the photointerviews. The first common theme, Community Support of the School, was a discussion of the types of interactions that occur between school and community when the community provides support for the school. Examples of community support described and discussed by participants included community support of school traditions, community fundraising and recognition of the school's graduates, regular attendance by community members to school athletic events, and community involvement with school and class projects on campus. The second theme, Activities and Traditions, was a presentation of interactions that involve the school and community as they shared in activities and annual observances associated with the school. Those activities and traditions identified by participants included the Baccalaureate Ceremony, Awards Banquet, Homecoming Ceremony, Indian Summer Festival, Old Fashion Day, Halloween, and Christmas. The third theme, Mutual Reliance, was a discussion of the different ways school and community support each other with a variety of resources. Often, this mutual reliance on each other provides opportunities for the school and community for interactions that can strengthen the relationship between them. The next part of this chapter is a presentation of individual themes.

Individual Themes

This part of the chapter is the themes specific to individual participants. These individual themes emerged as differences were found across participants' cases. For the first two research questions, looking across the cases, I have identified and organized five individual themes (see Table 6): two themes are organized under the first research question and three are organized under the second research question. For the third research question, I present seven individual responses from the eight private photoessays. For each research question, I first identify the individual theme or response and then follow with supporting documentation from each participant. Finally, I present a summary of individual themes/responses within each question.

Question 1: Conceptualizing the Relationship Between School and Community

Theme: Expectations of the Community. As discussed within the common theme Community Involvement and the common theme Community Support of the School, members of the community have a keen interest in the affairs of the school. As a teacher, Hank has found that, sometimes, local involvement requires him to deal with community expectations that differ from state curriculum standards and his own teaching philosophy. These expectations may affect the community's relationship with the school.

Hank talked about the reaction of some community members to his teaching the topic of evolution, a component of his science curriculum. This is an example of how the expectations of the community may sometimes differ from the goals of the state and the school:

> Hank: I've had community members get in contact with the administration. And, I've had the administration call me into the office and say, you know, "What is this? What do you do? Just tell me what you do?" So, I tell them that I do what

Table 6.
Individual Themes and Responses

Individual Themes	
Question 1	Expectations of the Community Old Habits
Question 2	Giving Back Centers for School and Community Interaction School as a Tool for Preserving Heritage in the Community
Individual Responses	
Question 3	Charlie's Vision for the Future Jim's Vision for the Future Mary's Vision for the Future Hank's Vision for the Future Henry's Vision for the Future Ryan's Vision for the Future Joy's Vision for the Future

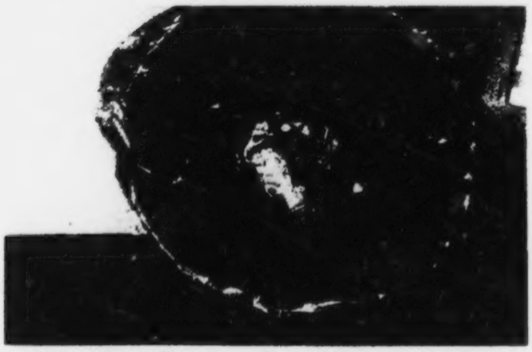
> my job tells me to do and that is to teach the origin of life from the evolution point of view, and nothing else. I've tried to make the issues mutually exclusive....They hire me to do this....I do address [evolution] from an academic point of view.

Hank is aware that his professional practices and philosophy may sometimes be in opposition with some community parents and students. And, although he continues to feel conflicted about this particular issue, he has reasoned out a position for himself that he finds is in keeping with his work as a teacher in the classroom and a member of the community. Earlier in this chapter, it was discussed that Hank feels that because of his standing in the community as a volunteer, parent, and teacher, he has gained the clout necessary to gain the ear of the community.

Theme: Old Habits. As a newcomer to the community, Ryan applauds the spirit and dedication of many the community's members. He is also perplexed by some community members' lack of interest in protecting local resources. He theorizes that perhaps some local people take their surroundings for granted because that's all they have known. Ryan uses his outsider perspective to consider this.

Without regulation or opportunity for disposal, abandoned vehicles are simply l eft for Mother Nature to handle.

> You know, cars just abandoned, because...well, nobody is going to come and say, "You have to take this out of here." And, then, it's just left to Mother Nature to take care of...it'll sit there, for, you know...I don't know how long. You see cars out in fields with grass growing through the engine.



Recycling efforts are not only difficult with students, but adults too. Individuals, who have been surrounded by a seemingly infinite supply of resources, take for granted the need to recycle. Conversely, individuals who have lived in urban areas see Suches as an endangered species, and seek to preserve its beauty and resources.

> Ryan: And, I think that it is just a habit...they've had all this around them for so long, they don't realize the importance of it. They don't realize the vanishing, you know, areas that are...because, they've never lived in a smog-infested, totally over-developed place.... So, I think the people, who moved in out here, see the rare...and that fact that this is something we need to be preserving.... I've made so many efforts. [Another teacher] and I have both tried to get the kids thinking that way. And, the kids are better really than the adults. It's the adults that are having a hard time, you know, changing their thinking....New habits just aren't easily formed.

As a member of the community, Ryan is frustrated with the resistance of some members to form new habits that may improve or preserve the countryside where they live. He worries that some members are taking their surroundings for granted. As a teacher in the school, Ryan is encouraged that his students, the younger members of the community, are willing to take action and are forming habits that may pay off for the community in the long run.

Summary. This section of the chapter presented individual themes organized under the first research question, "How do educators, students, and community members conceptualize the relationship between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" Two themes were presented. The first theme, Expectations of the Community, was Hank's discussion of the tension that sometimes arises between the community and the school, specifically him, when the curriculum conflicts with some members' beliefs or views. The second individual theme, Old Habits, was Ryan's discussion of his observations and concerns related to the issue of conservation of the community's natural resources and beauty. He is concerned that members take the natural setting for granted, while he is encouraged that his students are willing to step in as community caretakers. The next section of individual themes is organized under the second research question.

Question 2: School and Community Interactions

Theme: Giving Back. Common themes presented under the second research question discussed types of community interactions; these interactions were organized into three themes: Community Support of the School, Activities and Traditions, and Mutual Reliance. As a community member who was born and raised in the community and attended the local school, Charlie provided specific examples for her own individual interactions with the school. She identified skills and talents she gained from the school as a student and continues to nurture and use today as a community member. Charlie regularly interacts with the school. She supports it, observes its traditions, and participates in many of its activities. She returns to the school to share hobbies and skills she was taught as a student there. Hobbies she learned at the school and still maintains are fishing, candlewicking, and woodworking. While I was at the school, Charlie brought examples of her woodworking to share with students at the school. Charlie learned woodworking as a student at the school, and now, as a community member she annually returns to the school to demonstrate and to sell puppets she makes using skills she learned in school.

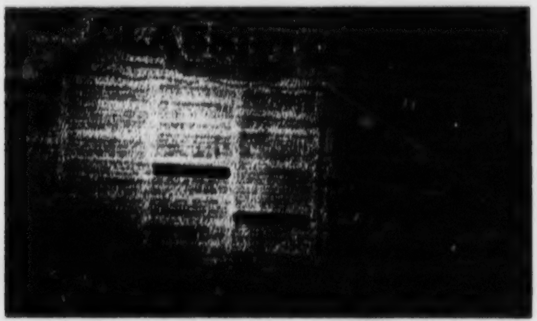
Woodworking. I also took a woodworking class as an elective during my senior year. The bunnies were one of my original projects. Now I make various items to sell at fall festivals, including the Indian Summer Festival.

This is the woodworking. When I was in high school, I had a construction class.... It was me and another girl; we had a woodworking class. We thought that was the most ridiculous thing. We fought it for a week....But when I got in there and we started doing this, I loved it....And now, I do that to sell at festivals, including the Indian Summer Festival. And here is one of my projects that we make and sell....I come back to the Festival I was raised with to sell them.

Charlie learned woodworking in school and continues to use this skill in the community. Charlie was also introduced to her profession while a student at the school. Now a health care professional, Charlie works in the community, providing health care and information on the health care profession to the school and to its students.

Nursing. I had a health occupation class my senior year. Up until that time, I had not decided what career to pursue when I finished school. Some of the information I was exposed to in that class increased my interest in the health care field. I went to North Georgia College and State University and obtained a BS in Nursing.

This is, of course, nursing. I put in here that I had health occupations in high school. And until that senior year of high school, I was a little unsure of what I wanted to do. I didn't know. I had a lot of questions, maybe this, maybe that. That class, I just loved. I loved the whole aspect of it.



Last year I was asked, as a community member, to demonstrate and discuss aspects of my career. I had a great time with the students.

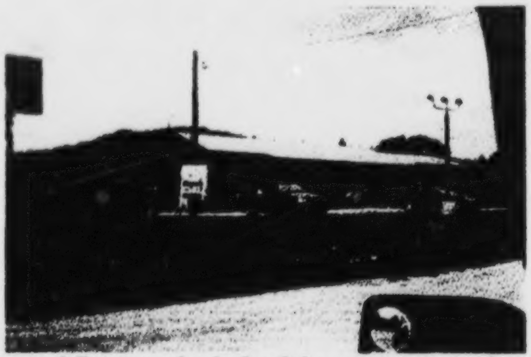
I did a demonstration with the kids on nursing. So, it was great. They loved it. They got to get dressed in the scrubs and the whole thing, pretend they were operating on somebody. It was fun; we had fun.

Sign. I am now working back in my community as the RN at the Medical Center located across the road from the school. I have worked in a hospital and with a home health agency outside of this community. I now enjoy working back close to home.

This one, the sign, represents how I am back in my community now, as a nurse, working in the medical center across from the school.... Now I'm back here, and I'm really enjoying being closer to home.

Charlie continues to bring her skills back to the school to contribute to school and community functions and to encourage the involvement of the school's students and the community's members. No longer a member of the school-going generation, Charlie is now a community elder who feels that it is her role to present her knowledge and experiences to students at the school, as others once did with her. She shares with students what it is like to be a trained professional, all the while continuing to work in her native community.

Theme: Centers for School and Community Interaction. Common themes presented under the second research question discussed types of community interactions. As a community member, Jim described several places in the Suches community that facilitate interactions between school members and community members. Jim listed these as important centers for gathering and disseminating information, information that is often centered on community and school activities. His examples of centers were the general store, post office and fire department.



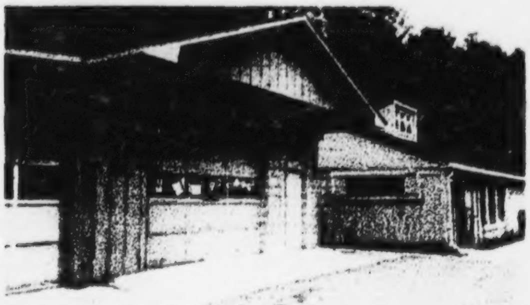
The Suches General Store is the hub of the community where all sorts of community as well as store business is transacted. It can be a handy place for impromptu parent/teacher conferences, passing school information to the fire department folks, finding UPS that was left there when the school was closed, etc

The General Store. If it doesn't happen at the General Store in Suches, everybody there knows where it was that it happened and who all is involved in it. [My wife] will probably tell you that she has had as many parent conferences at the General Store than she has had in her classroom, but that sort of stuff happens down there....Like I said, all kinds of news happens or gets reported there.

Post offices are part of the glue that holds small communities together and provides their identity....They touch the community and school in many ways including sponsoring a booth at the Indian Summer Festival.

The Post Office. Francis, the postmistress down there, for the last two years has had a booth at the Indian Summer Festival, for the post office! I mean, I didn't know whether they were going to advertise it and stuff like that. And, there was some talk last year that didn't happen about the possibility of having a special cancellation for the Festival, which you can do. So, we may end up doing some of that. That would be pretty...you know, post office involvement in the Sports Club, which means in the Indian Summer Festival, which means helping the school in some way or the other.

Jim includes the local volunteer fire station as another center for school and community interactions.

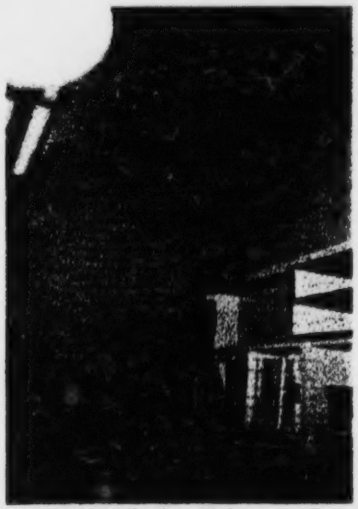


The original one bay station is on loan to the Pre-K program

> The original fire department is now where the pre-K program is, and it is on indefinite loan. We're hoping that we'll get it back when they get done messing around at the school down here. You've got all of these little bitty rugrats having to walk across the road a couple times a day for lunch and stuff like that.

In describing the general store, post office, and fire department, Jim mentions connections between school and community. At the General Store, his wife has impromptu discussions with some of the parents of her students. Jim explained how the post office is involved with the Indian Summer Festival, a event that provides the school with economic resources. And, the fire department is place where school is extended, housing its pre-k program. These centers are not on directly on the school campus; they are places in the community where it is possible for members of the community and school to interact.

Theme: School as a Tool for Preserving Heritage in the Community. Common themes organized under Question 2 presented interactions between school and community. Here I present an individual theme that is a consideration of the school as a historical connection between school and community that promotes interactions between the school and community. Mary, a teacher, discussed the historical links between school and community. Several of Mary's photographs represented places found in and around the school setting that are, at least for her, icons of the school's history. She sees the school as a teaching tool for her students and other members of the community; a tool that serves to keep local history vital and that invites the community to celebrate its shared culture and experience. This collective experience of members can connect members of the community to each other and also to the school. For example, the school, the local historical society, and several community members are working to have the school placed on the National Register of Historic Places. This prestigious designation would further add to the school's presence in the community as a historical point of interest. Mary is working on this project; she has a strong interest in the architectural and historical significance of the school building. For her photoessay, she represented and discussed parts of the campus that illustrate the school as a teaching tool for learning about local heritage.



*This corner shows **the corner with the old stove flue**. This shows **the character of the days gone by when teachers had to build fires**. It also, reminds community/school members of their heritage. Some community members remember the legend of the "Shot Gun Room.*

The state flower, The Cherokee Rose, grows at the back of the school. This is part of our heritage. A class decided to plant these to leave for us to enjoy.

Displayed in this trophy case are memorabilia from days past. There are generations of achievements documented here.

Mary: We also have a register that we are getting redone, reframed of former student lists of those who have died in the wars, have lost their lives fighting. [One of our teachers] is talking about doing that as a Student Council project. We are going to see about getting it reframed and hung back in the hallway. It's been there for years; it's a list of all the people who have given their lives. So, that reflects the patriotism of this area and pride.

Alice: Any ideas that have come up to you, that if you could take a mental picture, you would add to this group?

> Mary: Well, I didn't get a picture of the empty stage, the stage in the auditorium.
>
> Alice: Why would you take a picture of an empty stage?
>
> Mary: Well, to show that is the place where all the community performed plays, the original performance in the community by the Grand Ol' Opry stars, the entertainment, the cake walks. Somewhere in the archives, there is a picture of Ranger Arthur Woody standing on the stage with a cake in his hand for a cakewalk. There were box suppers; there were sweetheart balls. When my son went to school here, there were little plays. They even had movie reels here, at one time. The community could come in and see movies before the days of television. You know, this was the movie theater, I guess you could say! There is so much history. There are entertainers who have performed on the stage, nationally known—Kitty Wells, Red Foley. The local radio station, which was Gainesville, Georgia at that time, would come through with the country music entertainers in the fifties, and they would perform. Um, bluegrass people performed on that stage.

Mary has discovered areas of the school that have a story to tell about the school and community. She encourages her students to appreciate and to be aware of the significance of the school and to know its history. Students who attend the school have a connection to others in the community who attended the school in the past. In 1990, the school honored this connection by hosting a school and community celebration marking the fiftieth anniversary of the school's opening. All who had ever been students there were invited to attend. Over 300 alumni made an appearance and had their photographs taken (Moon, 1990). Many of the attendees are still residents of the community and have a keen interest in the welfare of the community's school.

Summary. This section of the chapter presented individual themes organized under the second research question, "What kinds of interactions do educators, students, and community members have between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" Three themes were presented. The first theme, Giving Back, was Charlie's discussion of how she regularly interacts with the school as a community member and professional working in the community. She contributes to the community and the school using skills she learned in school or first learned of in school. The second individual theme, Community Centers for Interactions, was a presentation of Jim's discussion of places in the community where community and school members can and do interact. The third individual theme, School as a Tool for Preserving Heritage in the Community, was Mary's perspective on the historical aspects of the school and its importance for the school and the community. The historical link between the school and the community provides opportunities for school and community interactions, such as the celebration held by the school for the community as it honored its fiftieth anniversary.

The next section of this chapter is the individual responses organized under the third research question, "How do educators, students, and community members envision the future for the relationship between this school and its community?" One participant did not respond to this question.

Question 3: Participants' Vision for the Future of the Relationship Between School and Community

Charlie's Vision for the Future. Charlie described a mental photograph, a photograph she did not actually produce but imagined as she thought about the relationship between Woody Gap School and Suches.

> *I really enjoyed participating in this project. I only wish I had taken a picture of the mountain roads. Of course, there are some drawbacks to going to school here. As most people know, we are very isolated. To leave this beautiful community, you must travel across one of three mountains.*

Because of this isolation, Charlie worries that young people living in the community do not have enough to do to keep them challenged and satisfied, and so, in the future, they may choose to leave. Charlie hopes that when younger members see professional community members continue to participate in their communities as skilled mentors andolunteers, they will see their places of birth as a valid and desired place to return and to contribute, as she has chosen to do.

Jim's Vision for the Future. Jim hopes that his community will resist dichotomizing its membership. Instead, he urges it to recognize that change, such as the increased presence of technology, may be unavoidable for Suches. He suggested that change may encourage community members to refocus on those values they hold most dear, while adapting their thinking to accommodate a more diverse perspective of acceptable community standards.

> My point has always been, not listened to by hardly anybody, that change is an inevitable thing, you can not stop it. There is not enough metal in the world to build a gate at Woody Gap that is going to keep things out. And if you see change threatening your way of life, you've got to retrench...the minimum position that should be taken is to retrench ...you can't prevent [change] from changing the values of the community. Because that's what these people are coming in for. There is something here that they like. And it ends up, I think, being a values thing more than anything else. We aren't plowing the fields with mules....And if you are going to let the technology come in...[you have to] realize that there is a lot of stuff in-between. Change is going to happen. People are going to come to this community. They are going to bring new ideas, a lot of which are foreign to the way of doing things to the people who are here.

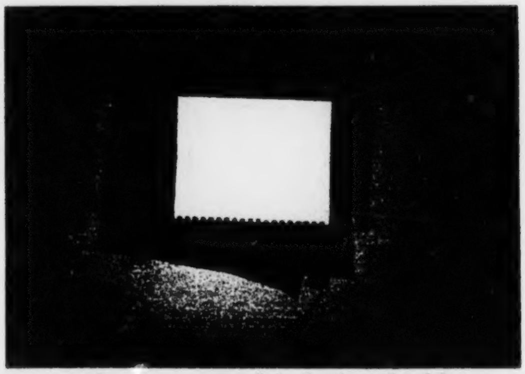
Jim's concern for the school and its relationship with the community is seasoned with the experience that comes with age and with participation in local affairs. He sees potential for improving the school and community relationship, and as an active community member, plans to have a continued hand in strengthening the bond between the two entities.

Mary's Vision for the Future. Mary feels that community participation in the school could be stronger. She sees the creation of a new media center, one that is accessible to the community as well as the school, and reclamation of the old auditorium as important means for increasing that participation.

> I think [participation] would be more if we had more ways of reaching out; if we could get a community media center that could be multiple use for school and community....With our location here, we really need that. And I think it would be a very good community school relation type thing...that's the dream--the goal, long-term.

Towards the end of our interview, I asked Mary what photograph she would create if she could have gotten to it. She chose to speak about photographing the empty stage in the auditorium (empty because of impending school renovations), returning to her vision for Woody Gap and her view of the importance of heritage. With her knowledge of what has gone on before, Mary longs for a return to a school arrangement where the auditorium is once again the center of school and community activity. She envisions a place where community members can once again get together, to participate in activities and revive traditions and events she holds to be vital for sustaining and enriching community and school experiences. While the auditorium is an important symbol for Mary because it is a link to pastimes that were wholesome and inclusive of all who wanted to participate, the notion of a new media center is a symbol of the future, a possibility for new school and community interactions. A media center may accommodate the school and community need for technology and continuing education. It may also allow the school and community to reclaim a part of its social structure that will build stronger and more vibrant bonds between its members and agencies.

Hank's Vision for the Future. Like Mary, Hank's vision revolves around a desire for a new school-community media center and the reclamation of the old auditorium as a multi-purpose space for the school and community.



A plan for the new media center modeled after the library in Murrayville. If built, it would serve the school as well as the community in life-long learning.

> I think the ulterior motive for [building a new media center] is to get the library out of the auditorium of the school....there is a lot of strong feelings in the community about losing the auditorium to the library. Well, there is just cause. We would really like to have the auditorium back for community meetings, for plays.

When I asked Hank what mental pictures he would have taken if he could, he returned to the idea of reverting the media center back into the school auditorium and building a new media center. He describes the "photograph" that represents part of his vision for Woody Gap School.

I wish I had taken a better picture of the media center…if we get the auditorium back, that would be a place maybe to integrate arts.

Alice: So that's part of your vision of a better Woody Gap?

Hank: A better Woody Gap would be to…and also an invitation to invite more community input. We could have the media center for continuing education, and also, have students there to staff it. They could be the librarians. And pay them to man the place. I just think that would be a wonderful activity. It would just be a means, I think, it would also be a better means for communication. A good many years back, it's easy to see that, although we are a small community, there's no vehicle for communication. Where a larger community might have a newspaper, a media center would facilitate the communication between a lot of folks out there, either father or mothers of children who go here or retired folks, given the opportunity…they really don't realize what an impact that could have. And really don't realize the opportunities that the school presents to them to give, and a lot of them have a lot to give. It's the key to sustaining the school…. I think that it's real pertinent for keeping Woody Gap going is to get more community involved in the school.

In his vision for Woody Gap School, Hank is inclusive of school and community. The new media center would invite the public in to for research and continuing education, with students recruited as staff. Hank also sees the media center as a place where information between school and community is facilitated. The auditorium would provide a space for collaborative projects--between grades and between the community and school. As a community member who works and sends his children to the local school, Hank is eager to see these additions to the school manifest as settings where his family and community can connect more with the school and with its own members.

Henry's Vision for the Future. I asked Henry about his ideas for making Woody Gap School a better place for learning. His response reflected his close ties to school and community.

Alice: Well, if you could change Woody Gap, and you may not want to, but if you could think of anything that you could change tomorrow and for the better for Woody Gap, what would that be? What would you like to see?

Henry: I'd like to see better facilities, like, the gym is fine in my opinion, but new lunchroom. And of course, they are renovating [them] now. Other than that, I don't see...

Alice: What about the size? Would you like to see it a little bit bigger, smaller, organized differently?

Henry: It's sort of hard to say. If you say size, there's what, 21 kids in the high school, something like that? If you say that you would like it bigger, then when it's bigger, you're going to complain that you like it smaller. But when it's smaller then you say, I wish there were more girls in the school, you know how that goes.

Alice: So maybe the social aspect?

Henry: But then you wouldn't really want to change it, it's just something you want to think about. I mean I don't think I would change it.

Alice: What about your course offerings? Do you find that the teachers, the school is able to offer what you need?

Henry: Yeah, I think so. I think for the small amount of teachers we have, the academic program is run really well.

Alice: Is there anything you wanted to take that you couldn't get?

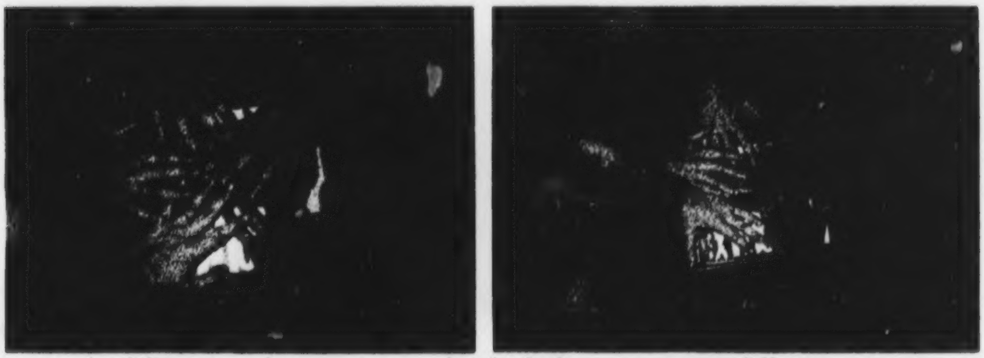
Henry: You mean at the school, that a bigger school might have?

Alice: Um, hmm.

Henry: Well, I think auto mechanics and welding are some things that I would like to do. But I think they are going to try and get a bit of that started next year. So, I guess that it just takes time.

Henry has advice to offer for improving Woody Gap School, but his advice is tempered with patience and an underlying acceptance of realistic constraints that occur when a school is small and isolated. He is willing to do without some of the programs and extras available in big schools, such as football and better facilities, because Henry finds the closeness and personal attention that comes with a small school setting is more important for him as a student and member of the community.

Ryan's Vision for the Future. Ryan used a metaphor of a mirror when he described his wish for his students' to recognize and appreciate individual differences. This discussion led to Ryan's explanation of his vision for Woody Gap, such as curriculum changes that will increase and improve opportunities and skills for students in settings beyond Suches community.



Lack of diversity often prevents individuals from accepting differences in race, color, culture, or creed. A community who only looks in the mirror becomes blinded its own image, so that it fails to see anything of value, except that which is reflected in its own people. By only seeing ourselves, we often hide others. Failure to only recognize differences impedes our ability to see the similarities

> I just felt that...with all of us the same color, we are, like, masking this opportunity to see people of different backgrounds. Everybody has the same backgrounds; it's almost like they become blinded by their own self. And, it's...by not having the opportunity to see other people of different backgrounds, you are...
>
> Alice: I think diversity is an abstract notion, if you are not in it.
>
> Ryan: Absolutely.

Alice: I mean, it's so hard to explain to people how to be in a multicultural setting if you are not in it. It's almost a pointless exercise, in some ways. So, we have to challenge our students to think abstractly.

Ryan: And it's really hard for them.

Alice: What are some ways the school could do that? Since this does seem to be an important issue: I mean, if this was an ideal school, what are some things it could do? You mentioned curriculum.

Ryan: Yeah, and we've got to…and that's one thing—is exposure. I think just being able to expose people, but therein lies the problem of travel…being able to get there. They don't allow us to take trips that are beyond the course of the day.

Alice: Right, and if travel was an easy thing, you'd all be going to Blairsville.

Ryan: Right. So…

Alice: I wonder if virtual travel…

Ryan: I've tried that.

Alice: Oh yeah?

Ryan: In my World Lit class, I let them explore—that's one of the things they have to explore and find five interesting things, to them, about that culture. And so, that's some exposure there. I just give the freedom to explore whatever concept it is. They kept saying, "Do you want?" And, I would say, "No, no. It's not what I want. You've got to understand, it's what you want. What do you want to find out about that culture?" And they have a hard time with that too.

As a teacher, it is important to Ryan to find a way to broaden his students' scope of tolerance while modeling tolerance and acceptance himself. Ryan sees one of his roles in the classroom as a guide, one who can provide his students with a window to multiple perspectives and diverse settings. Ryan considers these "excursions" into other cultures as opportunities for his students to ponder their commonalities and their differences. It is his hope that his provision of models of tolerance will make a positive impact on his students' perspectives of others.

Joy's Vision for the Future. Joy feels a strong sense of place in Suches and at Woody Gap School as evidenced by the level of her participation in school and community activities and her determination to stay in the Suches area. Unlike many other bright rural students who often leave their small and isolated communities (contributing to local "brain drain"), Joy hopes to continue her involvement with local activities important to the school and the community.

> Alice: Are you going to come back [to Woody Gap] after you graduate?
>
> Joy: Oh yeah! I plan on coming to everything I can.
>
> Alice: So do you see yourself staying in Suches for awhile?
>
> Joy: Yes.
>
> Alice: Why?
>
> Joy: I don't know. I just like the ruralness. I don't like a big crowd....The main thing I see is to tell you how involved we are...everyone really supports the school. Like if the school needs something, like the student council, they donate stuff or get money. Sometimes we have to [go outside of the community], but most of the time we can get it here if the community gets word of it, they will pitch in and help.
>
> Alice: Are you one of those community members?
>
> Joy: Oh yeah. I am going to come back and be very involved with this school.

There is no mistaking that Joy finds school a pleasant place to be and an important part of her life. Having attended school in on this campus all of her life, Joy feels a strong connection to Woody Gap. As an adult, she intends to continue her association with the school and its members.

Summary. This section of the chapter presented individual responses organized under the third research question, "How do educators, students, and community members envision the future for the relationship between this school and its community?" Seven individual responses were presented. Each response was a participant's particular vision for the future relationship between the school and its community. The first response was

Charlie's discussion of her concerns for students living and being schooled in an isolated area. The second response, Jim's Vision for the Future, presented Jim's perspective. He feels that the community and school should resist dichotomizing its membership. He predicts that change, such as the increased presence of technology, will be unavoidable for Suches, and suggests that change may encourage community members to refocus on those values that has brought them to or kept them in the community. The third response, Mary's Vision for the Future, presents Mary's vision for increased community participation in the school. She feels that the creation of a new media center, one that is accessible to the community as well as the school, and reclamation of the old auditorium as important means for increasing that participation. The fourth response is Hank's Vision for the Future. Like Mary, Hank's vision revolves around a desire for a new school-community media center and the reclamation of the old auditorium as a multi-purpose space for the school and community. Hank envisions these two changes as potential for increasing the dissemination of information from the school into the community. The fifth response, Henry's Vision for the Future, presents Henry's advice for improving Woody Gap School, but his advice is tempered with patience and an underlying acceptance of realistic constraints that occur when a school is small and isolated. The sixth response, Ryan's Vision for the Future, presents Ryan's desire for the school and the community to provide students with a curriculum that encourages greater tolerance toward diverse cultures and other cultural perspectives. The seventh response, Joy's Vision for the Future, is specific to Joy's vision for her own relationship with her school and community in the future. Her vision is to continue her participation in school and community activities, after she has graduated from the school. Hers is the last response presented in this section of the chapter. Her vision is tied back to the first response, Charlie's Vision for the Future, because Charlie hopes that isolation will not cause graduated community members to leave the area, and Joy has "testified" that she hopes to remain active and connected to her soon-to-be alma mater, returning to the community in which she was born and raised.

Summary of Chapter

For this chapter, I used the three questions guiding my research as the organizers for themes. Data from participants' private photoessays, participant's photographs, photofeedback, and photointerview transcriptions were used to create the themes. Themes were organized around two of these three research questions:

1) How do educators, students, and community members conceptualize the relationship between this small rural school and its surrounding community?

2) What kinds of interactions do educators, students, and community members have between this small rural school and its surrounding community?

Individual responses were organized around the third research question:

3) How do educators, students, and community members envision the future for the relationship between this school and its community?

Seven of the eight participants responded to this question.

To avoid redundancy, I chose to present data once within the category I felt was a best fit.

The first part of this chapter was a discussion of themes found to be common to more than one of the participants. To better assist the reader in recognizing commonalities highlighted in the discussion, I organized participant-produced photographs, their captions (photofeedback), and some transcribed oral responses from the photointerviews as collages and inserted them as figures throughout the discussion. Five common themes were organized under the first research question, "How do educators, students, and community members conceptualize the relationship between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" They were Kinship Connections, Kinship-Like Connections, Outsiders and Rules for Conduct, Exclusivity, and Involvement in the Community. Three common themes were organized under the second research question, "What kinds of interactions do educators, students, and community members have between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" The themes were Community Support of the School, Activities and Traditions, and Mutual Reliance.

The second part of the chapter presented the themes specific to individual participants. Examining each participant's private photoessay and looking for differences across cases, I created these themes and organized them under two of the three research questions. Individual themes organized under the first research question, "How do educators, students, and community members conceptualize the relationship between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" were Expectations of the Community and Old Habits. Individual themes organized under the second research question, "What kinds of interactions do educators, students, and community members have between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" were Giving Back, Community Centers for Interactions, and School as a Tool for Preserving Heritage in the Community. The last section of this part of the chapter was the individual responses organized under the third research question, "How do educators, students, and community members envision the future for the relationship between this school and its community?" Seven responses, the visions of Charlie, Jim, Hank, Henry, Ryan and Joy, were presented. Participants discussed their visions for improving the future relationship between the school and the community.

This chapter presented a cross-case analysis of the data collected from eight participants in this study. The findings were organized and presented first within common themes and then individual themes. Common themes were created when data from more than one individual were linked together. Individual themes were created when data from participants were not linked together because data collected pertained to a topic that presented a participant's perspective uniquely his or her own.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between a small rural school in Northeast Georgia and its surrounding community. To do this, I invited three teachers, two community members, and three students, all of whom have an intimate knowledge of the relationship between the community's school and the community, to act as informants in this study. These participants used cameras to collect data that related to their perceptions of the school and community relationship. They created photographs (for photointerviewing), then wrote about their photos (photofeedback, a form of photoelicitation), and, finally, they literally held their photos in their hands as they discussed their meanings with me (photointerviewing, a form of photoelicitation).

This chapter is a discussion of the findings and their implications for research and practice. I first summarize the findings that came out of the participant data collected, analyzed, organized, and presented as themes, specifically the themes (and responses) that emerged around the three research questions. Next, I discuss the findings specifically within the context of the literature and the implications these findings have for practical applications. Then, I present a discussion of the research methodology used for this study, specifically, the use of image-based research as a tool for data collection and a reflection on my experiences with the study's data management, analysis, and representation. Then, I consider my biases as a researcher, and finally, I provide suggestions for future research in the area of small rural schools and community.

Summary of the Study

After participants created photographs, wrote about them, and discussed their meanings with me, each set of data were organized as individual private photoessays. A private photoessay consists of a participant's photographs, photofeedback, and transcribed oral interview responses. I then used these private photoessays to identify emerging themes. Themes and responses were organized around three research questions and presented as individual public photoessays (see Chapter 5). The public photoessays are representations of a within-case analysis of participant data. These representations include selected participant-produced photographs, photofeedback, and transcribed oral interview responses.

In addition, I completed a cross-case analysis of participant data, looking across the cases for themes common to more than one participant and for themes unique to a participant (see Chapter 6). This analysis was presented in two parts. For the first part, common themes were presented with selected participant data, including collages created with participant-produced photographs, photofeedback, and transcribed oral responses. These collages were inserted, along with the appropriate themes, throughout this part of the chapter. The second part of the chapter was a presentation of individual themes under the first two research questions and individual responses under the third question. Discussions included selected participant data, such as participant-produced photographs, photofeedback, and transcribed oral responses.

A story of Woody Gap School was also presented (see Chapter 4). Data for the story were gathered from my field notes and photographs, local texts, demographics, and historical documents. They were used to provide a context and history for the reader as a means for assisting his or her understanding of the findings (in Chapters 5 and 6).

Within these three chapters, I attempted to describe the influences, identifications, and interactions that impact the relationship between a small rural school and its surrounding community. It is through the employment of image-based research and the use of local demographics and local and historical documents that I have attempted to document the relationship between a small rural K-12 unit school and its community and to present a descriptive picture of rural education in a particular setting.

With-In Case Analysis

The eight public photoessays I have presented are within-case findings to research questions I used to explore the relationship between a small rural school in Northeast Georgia and its surrounding community. The first research question, "How do educators, students, and community members conceptualize the relationship between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" is concerned with a participant's perceptions and sense-making about the nature and structure of the school and community relationship. Participant data from the two community members, Charlie and Jim, the three teachers, Hank, Mary, and Ryan, and two of the three students, Matt and Henry, were organized into themes to address this question. From their private photoessays, the themes Kinship Connections, Kinship-Like Connections, Outsiders and Rules for Conduct, Exclusivity, Community Involvement, Expectations of the Community, and Old Habits emerged.

The second question, "What kinds of interactions do educators, students, and community members have between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" was responded to by most of the participants: community members, Charlie and Jim, teachers, Hank, Mary, and Ryan, and two of the three students, Henry and Joy. They provided a list of a variety of activities, traditions, and cooperative efforts that invite school and community interactions. These interactions were organized into themes: Community Support of the School, Activities and Traditions, Mutual Reliance, Giving Back, Centers for School and Community Interactions, and School as a Tool for Preserving Heritage in the Community.

The third question, "How do educators, students, and community members envision the future for the relationship between this school and its community?" asked each participant to forecast how he or she imagines the school and community relationship will or should manifest itself in the future. Responses organized around this theme were participant's visions for an improved school and community relationship and interactions and suggestions for accomplishing those visions. Most of the participants, Charlie, Jim, Mary, Hank, Henry, Ryan, and Joy all expressed their thinking about the future.

Cross-Case Analysis

For this part of the study, I again used the three questions guiding my research as the organizers for presenting themes (and responses) found as the result of a cross-case analysis of the data: participants' private photoessays comprised of participant's photographs, photofeedback, and photointerview transcriptions (see Chapter 6). To avoid redundancy, I chose to present data once within the category I felt was a best fit.

Common themes. The first part of the presentation of the cross-case analysis was a discussion of themes found to be common to more than one of the participants. To better assist the reader in recognizing commonalities highlighted in the discussion, I organized participant-produced photographs, their captions (photofeedback), and some transcribed oral responses from the photointerviews together to create collages and inserted them as figures throughout the discussion. Five common themes were organized under the first research question, "How do educators, students, and community members conceptualize the relationship between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" They were Kinship Connections, Kinship-Like Connections, Outsiders and Rules for Conduct, Exclusivity, and Involvement in the Community. The first common theme, Kinship Connections, was a discussion of participants' references to and examples of family involvement with school and community. The second theme, Kinship-Like Connections, presented participants' perceptions of the family-like connections between peers, young and older students, and the settings in which these connections are made and played out. The next theme, Outsiders and Rules for Conduct, was a discussion of the expectations of the members of the community, specifically, the rules for conduct in the community and how these expectations affect newcomers to the community and school settings. The fourth theme, Exclusivity, presented some participants' perspectives of the exclusion of others by community members who strongly adhere to the rules for conduct in the community and when they feel excluded as a result of working in an isolated setting. The last theme, Involvement in the Community, was a discussion of some participants' examples and references to a work ethic and community spirit that has promoted member involvement in community and school efforts.

Three common themes were organized under the second research question, "What kinds of interactions do educators, students, and community members have between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" The themes were Community Support of the School, Activities and Traditions, and Mutual Reliance. The first common theme, Community Support of the School, was a discussion of the types of interactions that occur between school and community when the community provides support for the school. Examples of community support described and discussed by participants included community support of school traditions, community fundraising and recognition of the school's graduates, regular attendance by community members to school athletic events, and community involvement with school and class projects on campus. The second theme, Activities and Traditions, was a presentation of interactions that involve the school and community as they shared in activities and annual observances associated with the school. Those activities and traditions identified by participants included the Baccalaureate Ceremony, Awards Banquet, Homecoming Ceremony, Indian Summer Festival, Old Fashion Day, Halloween, and Christmas. The third theme, Mutual Reliance, was a discussion of the different ways school and community support each other with a variety of resources. Often, this mutual reliance on each other provides opportunities for the school and community for interactions that can strengthen the relationship between them.

The second part of the presentation of the cross-case analysis included the themes and responses specific to individual participants. Examining each participant's private photoessay and looking for differences across cases, I created themes and organized them under two of the three research questions and arranged individual responses under the third research question. Individual themes organized under the first research question, "How do educators, students, and community members conceptualize the relationship between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" were Expectations of the Community and Old Habits. The first theme, Expectations of the Community, was Hank's discussion of the tension that sometimes arises between the community and the school, specifically him, when the curriculum conflicts with some members' beliefs or views. The second individual theme, Old Habits, was Ryan's discussion of his observations and concerns related to the issue of conservation of the community's natural resources and beauty. He is concerned that members take the natural setting for granted, while he is encouraged that his students are willing to step in as community caretakers.

Individual themes organized under the second research question, "What kinds of interactions do educators, students, and community members have between this small rural school and its surrounding community?" were Giving Back, Centers of School and Community Interaction, and School as a Tool for Preserving Heritage in the Community. The first theme, Giving Back, was Charlie's discussion of how she regularly interacts with the school as a community member and professional working in the community. She contributes to the community and the school using skills she learned in school or first learned of in school. The second individual theme, Centers of School and Community Interaction, was a presentation of Jim's discussion of places in the community where community and school members can and do interact. The third individual theme, School as a Tool for Preserving Heritage in the Community, was Mary's perspective on the historical aspects of the school and its importance for the school and the community. The historical link between the school and the community provides opportunities for school and community interactions, such as the celebration held by the school for the community as it honored its fiftieth anniversary.

The last section of this part of the chapter consisted of the individual responses organized under the third research question, "How do educators, students, and community members envision the future for the relationship between this school and its community?" Seven responses, the visions of Charlie, Jim, Mary, Hank, Henry, Ryan and Joy, were presented. Participants discussed their visions for improving the future relationship between the school and the community. The first response, Charlie's Vision for the Future, was Charlie's discussion of her concerns for students living and being schooled in an isolated area. The second response, Jim's Vision for the Future, presented Jim's perspective. He feels that the community and school should resist dichotomizing its membership. He predicts that change, such as the increased presence of technology, will be unavoidable for Suches, and suggests that change may encourage community members to refocus on those values that has brought them to or kept them in the community. The third response, Mary's Vision for the Future, presents Mary's vision for increased community participation in the school. She feels that the creation of a new media center, one that is accessible to the community as well as the school, and reclamation of the old auditorium as important means for increasing that participation. The fourth response is Hank's Vision for the Future. Like Mary, Hank's vision revolves around a desire for a new school-community media center and the reclamation of the old auditorium as a multi-purpose space for the school and community. Hank envisions these two changes as potential for increasing the dissemination of information from the school into the community. The fifth response, Henry's Vision for the Future, presents Henry's advice for improving Woody Gap School. His concerns center around facilities and course offerings, but his advice is tempered with patience and an underlying acceptance of realistic constraints that occur when a school is small and isolated. The sixth response, Ryan's Vision for the Future, presents Ryan's desire for the school and the community to provide students with a curriculum that encourages greater tolerance toward diverse cultures and other cultural perspectives. The seventh response, Joy's Vision for the Future, is specific to Joy's vision for her own relationship with her school and community in the future. Her vision is to continue her participation in school and community activities, after she has graduated from the school. Hers is the last response presented in this section of the chapter. Her vision is tied back to the first response, Charlie's Vision for the Future, because Charlie hopes that isolation will not cause graduated community members to leave the area, and Joy has "testified" that she hopes to remain active and connected to her soon-to-be alma mater, returning to the community in which she was born and raised.

This part of the study was a presentation of the cross-case analysis of the data collected from eight participants. The findings were organized and presented first within common themes and then individual themes. Common themes were created when data from more than one individual were linked together. Individual themes were created when data from participants were not linked together because data collected pertained to a topic that presented a participant's perspective uniquely his or her own.

Discussion of Findings

This section of this chapter is a discussion of the findings, specifically, the themes that were identified, arranged, and represented. The reader is reminded that these themes emerged from data initially collected by the participants. Participants were asked to represent the school and community relationship. Independent of each other and of the researcher, participants reported their perspectives through their photographs and written responses to their photographs, they then discussed their collected data with me during photointerviews. Themes come out of participant-produced data: each participant moved and acted with the camera on his or her own, without specific protocols or pointed direction to lead or dissuade them.

Kinship and Kinship-Like Connections

Imagine attending a small, rural school located in the community where you were born. Now, imagine that this school is your community's only school, housing grades kindergarten through twelve. You live in an isolated area, and this is the only school you will ever attend. Chances are that if you, your parents, and your grandparents were born in this community, the roots of your family tree have reached and permeated your school. There is also a strong chance that you will be related to someone in your school—a teacher, another student, the custodian, the school secretary. This association with family becomes part of who you are at school. You become accustomed to seeing family members every day at school. You become accustomed to knowing people who know your family. And, because you are with the same small number of people in an intimate setting for years and years, you become accustomed to knowing people who know you like family.

Several participants in this study talked about their families in connection with the school and community. They also spoke of the family-like or kinship-like connections they observed or experienced at school and in the community. Participant references to family when describing the relationship between school and community indicate strong attachments to these social groups. Referring back to (the discussion in Chapter 2 of) Tönnies's system of sociology, I explained how he proposed that social organization is comprised of two fundamental concepts: community or *Gemeinschaft* and society or *Gesellschaft*. Rather than viewing these concepts as dichotomous, he placed these forms of culture on a continuum, with social groups falling somewhere between the two. But, there is a "messiness" to trying to place groups on a static point of the continuum. According to Tönnies, a social group is in a constant state of both *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, at times falling on the continuum closer to one end than the other. Tönnies acknowledged the dialectic processes of living and felt that social groups should be considered in states of "more or less" along the continuum, rather than an "either or" status (Cahnman, 1995).

The ever-changing social group moves back and forth along the continuum between community and society. Keeping in mind this complexity that is inherit when considering the state of social groups, I found that although participants talked about school and community in different ways, based on their perspectives and experiences, many discussed school and community in terms of kinship and kinship-like connections, placing these social groups "more" towards the *Gemeinschaft* end of the continuum.

Common bonds of blood, place, and mind. Social groups range from the most basic of community, i.e. mother and child, to the asocial, i.e. the individual. Tönnies lists three types of community relationships: 1) blood, the strongest bind despite time and distance; 2) place, such as one's birthplace or a neighborhood; and 3) mind (e.g., friendship). This last *Gemeinschaft* is the least binding when it comes to lasting social connections, yet it "represents the truly human and supreme form of community" (Tönnies in Sergiovani, 1994, p. 6). Through community, people know a small circle of friends and family well and conduct economic, religious, and social business with the same members of their community throughout their lives (Martinez-Brawley, 1990; Merz and Furman, 1997).

Looking at each of these three types of community, one will find that many members of the school and the community in this study could be assigned to all three groups: 1) at the school and in the community, many members are related by blood; 2) many of these same members are native-born to the area; and 3) because there is only one school; one that is very small, accommodates grades K-12, and is located in the community, many of these same members who were born and raised in the community with other kin, spend years with each other in a small intimate setting and, as a result, form close bonds of friendship and dependence. Sometimes these bonds of friendship and dependence are so close, members who experience them feel connections that are kinship-like—to the point that they may even choose to eschew romantic involvements with one another. Charlie explains,

> You didn't really…I didn't date the boys here very much. But I dated outside in different communities. But the boys here would always be very, almost protective. They would want to know who it is…where…would have to meet them almost like a brother or a cousin would, so that was very interesting

Tönnies (1887/1957) asserted that "the village community and the town themselves can be considered as large families" (p. 223). Members may be like family in that they know intimate details about one another: "And when you go to a school like this, you know everything about everybody, which is not always good….You know just about everything that you would want to know or don't want to know." (Charlie, Chapter 5).

Members of the school and community are bound together not only through blood ties, but also by ties of birthplace and lifelong associations with one another. And, as discussed above, although these associations may be forms of community, they are not static on the continuum. They are constantly changing as the interactions of the members of the community and school increase or decrease with others who do not have the same membership or who have had experiences different from the group. Interactions may affect the cohesion of the community. One way for the school and the community to continue cohesion of community is through intergenerational closure.

Intergenerational closure. Coleman (1987) carries Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft* into his discussion of intergenerational closure, a social structure he sees as "an extended network of kinship, friendship, and work relations that pervade...the community" (p.182). Through communication and support, community members take it upon themselves to be the gatekeepers of the community and its values and the watchdogs of its members. Miller (1991) sees this social structure as a community mechanism for sharing resources, providing support, and "developing norms for governing children's behavior" (p. 18). Through intergenerational closure, community members transmit what Miller calls "mutual understandings" of values (p. 18) and this creates a system of cohesion for the community. This cohesion of community between members can also create an insider privilege that sets up negation for those who are not a part of this cohesion; on different levels, one is left outside (or perceives that one is being left outside) of the group, over time or by place. Negation may be extreme enough for an outsider to be excluded or to feel excluded from the group. Participants in this study discussed their understanding of how members in the school and the community practice intergenerational closure. They provided examples of how members transmit mutual understandings of local values through rules for conduct; rules that govern these mutual understandings and keep them in tact. Participants also described what they think it means to be an insider or an outsider in the school and community, and how the community effort to create cohesion may result in excluding some that seek entry into the community.

Rules for Conduct, Outsiders, Insiders, and Exclusivity

Before entering the research setting for this study, I had already considered aspects of community from the perspective of several scholars and philosophers (see Chapter 2). Since leaving the field, my thinking about what it means to be a member of a community has grown more complex and now my perception of what is a community is ebbs and flows; overlaps and tangles. It would be incorrect to look at what is happening in a setting like a small school and community and state simply, "This is *Gemeinschaft* as Tönnies, Weber, and Coleman would define it." There is more to it, as these scholars would assert. Individuals move in and out of groups and away from them. This movement happens over time and space. Movements in and out of groups usually require interactions and actions. These actions are willed genetically and/or structurally. Tönnies assigned the notions of essential or existential will to *Gemeinschaft* and arbitrary or reflective will to *Gesellschaft*. He asserted that these concepts are constantly in tension with each other as they co-exist. Cahnman (1995) explains:

> According to Toennies [sic], both the Aristotelian statement that man is a social being and the Hobbesian thesis that man is by nature asocial are correct. Man's initial outlook and attitude, or his essential will, is based on communal, or shared, feelings, such as liking, habituation, and memory.... In kinship and friendship, ideally speaking, man's attachment is total and means and end are undifferentiated. But the initial togetherness, as it were, is disturbed by arbitrary or reflective will, that is, by thought that leads to single-mindedly purpose-oriented action, irrespective of the means employed....Man, the possessive individual, is on his own, pursuing his separate happiness (p. 92).

Cahnman states that Tönnies's identified the concept of individualism as the lever for social change. Individualism comes from the questioning of the world. He quotes Tönnies: "It is the factor of thought and hence of reason that provides the dynamic element in the development of culture, as it does in the intellectual development of every human being" (p. 93). Cahnman goes on to explain how Tönnies juxtaposed the idea of wills within social organization; he states that

> "*Gemeinschaft* is unity prior to the rise of individuality, *Gesellschaft* is individuality prior to establishment of unity. In Gemeinschaft, unity is a point of departure, an existential fact; in *Gesellschaft*, unity is deliberately constructed. If *Gemeinschaft* weakens,…*Gesellschaft* must take its place. (p. 95)

There is a cyclic or "chicken and the egg" type of logic in these assignments, but it helps account for the complexities that arise when attempting to understand what happens when members in a school and a community interact and act. In a community, like Suches, members constantly make choices and decisions. The choices and decisions are based on experiences and will. Shared experiences, beliefs, memories, bloodlines, and customs may drive choices and decisions, actions and interactions. Essential will (*Gemeinschaft*) is less arbitrary, less reflective than the will associated with *Gesellschaft*, the end of the continuum that includes social groups that are deliberately constructed, stratified, and set in motion by deliberate actions of individuals. How does a community maintain its *Gemeinschaft*, its members' shared customs, beliefs, memories, bloodlines and experiences that define it? How does the community share this information? What happens when a newcomer is looking to gain entry into the community, but has other attributes or perspectives gained from his or her individual thought and/or from some other community or constructed social group, for example a large city or another school? Tensions among a community's members may arise as notions of community vacillate along the continuum or when newcomers (outsiders) attempt to navigate and negotiate ways to gain entry, bringing perspectives or practices that are in direct opposition to the "mutual understandings" of the group's values. These tensions may subside, leaving the community's rules for maintaining its attributes intact or they can result in social change.

Rules for Conduct. Tönnies argued that the common center that comes from a shared "concord, folkways, mores, and religion" is where the individual's strength is "rooted and his rights derive" (p. 223). He suggested that,

> "under certain conditions and in some relationships, man appears as a free agent in his self-determined activities and has to be conceived of as an independent person. [But when] the substance of the common spirit has become so weak or the link connecting him with the others worn so thin that it has to be excluded from consideration....[then] there is no common understanding, and no time-honored custom or belief [to create] a common bond....[this will lead to] war and the unrestricted freedom to destroy and subjugate one another. (p. 223)

Strong words. But this is Tönnies's continuum to the extreme, and as discussed earlier, the two ends of the organization of society are in constant company and tension. Tönnies believed that it is inevitable for individuals to have arbitrary and reflective thought, and so, for a social group to move toward the *Gemeinschaft* end of the continuum requires vigilance and cohesion among members of the group. Just as members in a family watch over the young and take to task the unwieldy or the unschooled, members in the community family may take it upon themselves to be the gatekeepers of the community and the transmitter of its values, customs, beliefs, and memories. As the community's guardians, members may signal to the community's youth and newcomers what is acceptable action, or unacceptable action, within the social structure of community. They convey the rules for conduct for living in the community. Participants in this study discussed ways members such as teachers, volunteers, parents, students, and other locals convey rules for conduct. Participants provided examples of two ways they do this, through modeling and through reinforcement. Often, school is the setting where this is done.

Modeling and reinforcement: Interactions between school and community. Since it is a setting where the youth of the community are asked to defer to its elders, school is an active stage for these rules for conduct to be passed on, reinforced, and modeled. In this study, some participants identified ways the community transmits its values and rules for conduct within the school setting. One method presented was through modeling by community members as they provided support for the school. Participants gave examples of members modeling for students, and each other, as volunteers, tutors, project workers, and demonstrators of professional skills and crafts. They listed other ways members model rules for conduct in the community within the school setting: some members strive as individuals or as members of community organizations to provide resources, acknowledge academic and extracurricular student achievements, and celebrate school milestones with students, teachers, and staff. Members in the community may express commonly held values and rules as they interact with students as spectators at school and community sports events, members of their churches, or participants in community activities held at the school.

As Hank reported, some members may attempt to reinforce community values by challenging the school's curriculum or the philosophy of a teacher. Another way participants suggested the community's values and rules are reinforced is through routine interactions between the school and community, such as traditional observances of festivals, holidays, and events. These interactions also allow members in the community to "show" their values to students and to each other. During some of our discussions that touched on the topic of the arrival of new members to the community, several participants suggested that the showing of one's values might be a way for one to gain entry into the community.

Insiders and Outsiders. Those members of the community who are native-born and have several generations of family born in the community are perceived by some of the participants as having an advantage over "outsiders". Cahnman explains his thinking on this, based on Tönnies:

> [Kinsmen, neighbors, and friends] act . . . under the impact of "a common will, or spirit, which surrounds the individual like a living substance" and this common will, in turn, rests on the similarity of the conditions in which it originates and develops in the individuals concerned. Consequently, kinsmen (I consider the concepts of neighbor and friend as initially included in the concept of kinsman) are agreed upon their mutual rights and obligations. As the validity of these rights

> and obligations is not questioned, they are considered inviolable and "sacred." (p. 95) [Tönnies's words are in quotation marks]

Participants in this study who have been community members in the area and have been active in the community for 15 years or more still consider themselves to be outside of the community at some level. Cahnman discussed Tönnies's historical observation of this tension. He is uncertain as to when Tönnies envisioned the initial impact of the outsider to the community to be, but he provides his example of an early outsider to the community: Tönnies discussed the visiting trader:

> The trader and the native are united by no such bond [of common will]. The trader is a stranger, a man who enters the magic circle from the outside; in the context of the society where he plies his trade, he is a detached individual. (p. 95)

According to Tönnies, the trader is not a community member, but a representative of a larger society, different from the local community and outside of its common will. Conceivably, interaction with the outsider affects the cohesion of the community.

In his famous study conducted in a small rural town during the early 1970's, Peshkin (1978) discussed the outsider in the community. He looked at schooling and living in a small community in the mid-west. He related a dualistic sense of community: one of insiders and outsiders:

> Although many Mansfielders deny one must have family ties to feel at home in Mansfield, otherwise well-settled persons still admit to feeling left out because of the prominence of kinship in local social life (p. 27) "If you weren't born here," says Mrs. Langley, "you're an outsider. If you were, you're OK." ... [She is] joined by many others who believe that without relatives living in the community it hard to feel you really belong.... These are the persons who share the space of Mansfield, but not its community. (p. 33)

Unlike those cited in Peshkin's study, participants in this study who were not native-born but have lived and participated in the community a long time, did not seem to express any resentment as they matter-of-factly pointed out that they were "set apart" in some ways in the community. It may be the security that sometimes comes with maturity, personal satisfaction, and contentment with his or her position in the community that assuages resentment. These members, along with the other participants in the study, are involved in the community. They have had opportunities to show their values in the school and the community settings and to learn its rules for conduct. Over the years, public demonstrations of values that fit with the community's system may have provided opportunities for participants who are not native-born to gain entry into the community, if not total acceptance.

Exclusivity. Not all participants in this study feel comfortable with their status within the community. Sometimes, there is a tension between members and the community that is so strong, that members may feel excluded or members of the community may seek to exclude others from their community. Max Weber (in Merz & Furman, 1997) concluded that the commonalities of the group created the possibility of coercion. When communities are closely monitored by its members, the individual's choice or will may be limited or stymied. Miller (1995) worries as does Coleman (1987) that intergenerational closure may be "associated with [an] exclusivity and a separatist attitude that can isolate the children from the outside world. Children growing up in a close-knit community may be ill-equipped to enter the larger society or suffer culture shock upon entry" (Miller, p. 18). One of my journal entries troubles these possibilities:

> Religion. This piece is a pointy one. On Monday, I noticed that the 10 commandments were posted in [a particular place] There is also a sign in [a particular place] that states, "Good morning. This is God. I will be handling all of your problems today. I will not need your help. Have a good day." [There are two places with] signs that say, "In God We Trust. The National Motto of the United States Congress." In [another place] is a magazine that is called *Focus on the Family* with the headline: "Celebrating Christ's Resurrection." Christian music plays softly in [a particular place]

> I didn't go looking for these religious references. I didn't even think about their existence or notice them on previous visits. But on the morning the principal introduced me to the faculty, he prefaced his introduction by telling of his recent flight in turbulent weather. A faculty member quoted scripture ("And lo, I am always with you"—everyone laughed good-naturedly). This really surprised me. Since then I have been "bumping" into these icons. At first, I was concerned ("Isn't this a violation of separation of church and state?"), then I thought of Coleman's and Miller's discussions around intergenerational closure. Intergenerational closure can be a double-edged sword; it is the care, guidance, and protection of the community's members by other community members, but it is also the gatekeeper. It can deter individual expression and actions. So, I am guessing that it might be difficult for a student who is experimenting with a lifestyle, personal philosophies, or a political perspective that are seemingly in opposition to Christian tenets to find a safety net openly in this community. Of course, I don't know for sure, and I am wondering if it is possible that since all of the schools in Suches began in churches, the church is [now] an integral part of the school and part of the school's safety net.
>
> [Someone] was showing me some old school photos this morning and pointed to a huge guy in the basketball team photo. He said he thought he [was working and living elsewhere] and was [different]. Evidently, he was teased unmercifully, but no one really bothered him because he was so big. [This person's] summary statement was most telling: "No one ever talks about him anymore; he just isn't part of it here." (Sampson, 2000)

It is possible that this former student left his community to join a social group that is constructed to accommodate his individual needs and concerns. This seems to be the paradox of community: it is different from society because, like family, it "embraces" its members, regardless of who they are, yet, like "family," members often insist that everyone follow the rules for conduct and to conform to the "common will." Rules for cohesion, inclusion, can become mechanisms for exclusion.

Involvement in the Community

Several participants suggested that in showing one's values and changing one's behavior, an outsider may gain entry into the community and the school. Words like "see," "show," "expose," "mold," "get along" and "fit in" were used by participants to describe behaviors for acceptance. When an outsider demonstrates a set of values that runs contrary to the community's, living an active social or work life in the community may be difficult. Several participants stated that they knew of people in the community and the school who had left the area because they were unable to fit within the norms that the community valued. Residents of the community demonstrate for each other their understanding of community values for other members through involvement in the school and the community.

Involvement has a historical importance in this community that dates back to days of harsh subsistence farming and mining in the area: neighbors helped neighbors so that the community could continue to sustain itself. Today, neighbors still help neighbors, and involvement in the community by members provides opportunities for modeling and reinforcement of the community's values system. In addition, in the spirit of neighbors helping neighbors, members who participate in community affairs and tasks contribute to the community's social capital. Warner, Hinrichs, Schneyer, and Joyce (1997) define social capital as "those features of social organization—networks, norms of reciprocity and trust—which facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. 2). Flora and Flora (1993) have found that when communities have high levels of social capital, they are able to better deal with problems that arise within the community and from without. They suggest that a community with a high level of social capital usually benefits from its members: when there is a network of trust, members are more willing to work constructively and consciously to solve problems. In this study, participants related examples of social capital employed to solve problems for the school and the community.

An example of this employment of social capital is the school and community's arrangement of mutual reliance.

Mutual Reliance

In the above discussions, interactions between school and community members were described as ways that members of the community demonstrate their values for others and reinforce the rules for conduct in the community. Involvement in the community through activities in the school and the community's setting allows members to demonstrate values while building social capital—the cooperation among members for a mutual benefit. A common theme that emerged from several participants' private photoessays is one of mutual reliance between the school and the community. Mutual reliance occurs when the school and its community rely on each other for resources and support. These are interactions with a practical purpose and often come out of necessity, efficiency, and self-reliance. Examples of mutual reliance interactions include projects between the Volunteer Fire Station and the school (such as the loan of the station to the Pre-Kindergarten program) and the use of school facilities for social functions by community organizations or groups (wedding receptions, baby showers, family reunions). Other examples of mutual reliance interactions between the school and its community occur when student projects provide a service for the community and yield economic profits for the school (greenhouse, recycling, and sports events). Another example is the use of the school's facilities by community organizations for activities that directly benefit the school (fundraisers, shared outdoor facilities, firefighting drills, and community and continuing education classes). These interactions lead to a stronger relationship between school and community; help position the school as the center of the community, and create greater efficiency, promoting self-reliance. The positive results of these interactions may encourage the community and the school to continue to network and build its social capital. For some participants, their visions for the future of the school and community relationship centered on activities that could increase social capital. These activities are other interactions intended to foster a sense of place and belonging for its members and provide venues that may encourage more community members to be participants in the school and community relationship.

Visions for the Future of the Relationship between the School and Its Community

Some participants' ideas for improving the relationship between the school and its community were holistic in scope rather than specifically prescriptive; they discussed a need for the community to accept change as an inevitable and welcome aspect of the future for the school and the community and felt encouraged by the recent arrival of newcomers from diverse settings as possible change agents. Two participants didn't envision change as much as they did their own continued involvement with the school and with the community.

Other participants had more specific notions for improving the school and community relationship in the future. Two participants "wished" for the realization of a proposed project envisioned by many others several years ago in the school and its community. This project represents a balance between the past and the future, icons that embrace the community's past while planning for the community's future. The goals of this project are to 1) reclaim the school's original auditorium as a school and community activity space and 2) build a combination public-school media center, a space for students to learn and for members of the community to continue their education.

Reclaimed and refurbished, the new-old auditorium could connect the school and community to the historical past of its relationship, a tool for preserving local heritage and traditions. School and community members could once again promote and participate in school and community activities such as plays, musical performances, town hall meetings, socials, and fundraisers in the space, a place for creative, political, and social expression. Along with the return of a refurbished auditorium, the construction of a new school-public media center could serve both the students and faculty of Woody Gap and the citizens of the Suches community, providing an economic, intergenerational approach to continuing education and technology training.

This model for strengthening the school-community relationship could address Charlie's concern that there isn't enough for young people to do in the community, Ryan's concern for a curriculum that promotes and involves student learning about diverse settings and groups could be addressed, Henry's wish for better facilities without sacrificing the intimacy of a small school setting, and Joy's vision for continued involvement with the school and community.

The auditorium could provide a local anchor for the members of the community, a place where the community is invited in to participate in activities that embrace history, fine arts, current events, and the creative process. Students could work with community members and teachers to produce plays and musical productions that celebrate the local traditions of the community or explore other settings. Movies with diverse cultural perspectives could be screened. The auditorium's stage could hold local or visiting drama, music, or dance troupes. The auditorium represents a possibility for expression that is unique to the community of Suches and its school. By creating a place that is its own, graced with local talent, skills, and dreams, the school and community may challenge the ever pervading rural stereotype, the rural anti-intellectualism, that is prevalent in the larger society and often encountered outside of rural places.

The new media center could provide a sail to take school and community members out into the larger community for new experiences. For example, an exhibit space in the media center could provide a place for visiting artists or local artists (students and other members in the community) to display their crafts and artistic talents. A community room in the center could provide a place for local members or visitors to present "travel talks." Storytellers could provide early literacy programs for toddlers and preschoolers. Parenting classes could be held in the center, along with other continuing education courses. Communication technologies (electronic mail and the World Wide Web) could provide members access to other groups. A new media center could provide technology training, access to multimedia platforms, and Internet use for its students and community members. Technology could offer opportunities for members to telecommute, to work in settings outside of their community, virtually, while remaining in their community and contributing to its social (and economic) capital. It could provide a safe, comfortable place for its young people to meet, to read, to think. There, members of all ages could see each other as lifelong learners in the community.

Conclusion

Woody Gap School and the community of Suches have an intimate relationship as described by the participants in this study. The relationship between school and community is defined by common and frequent interactions and associations among kin, neighbors, and members of the community that permeate the school setting and the community. Members in the community settings reinforce the values of the community and teach the rules for conduct to young and new members. Often this is done on at the local school by members "showing" values, modeling, and participating in activities and events that involve interactions between the school and the community. Participants provided examples of methods for maintaining community cohesion. They also provided examples of how a "common will" can create barriers for outsiders or those who do not conform to the community's social structure. Lastly, participants provided their visions for the future of the relationship between the school and the community. The vision for the future school and community relationship in which the old school auditorium is reclaimed and returned to its original use and a new media center is built for the school and the community has symbolic and practical implications for action.

A new media center and refurbished auditorium are symbols of balance for an isolated rural community that has its school in its center. They symbolize renewed possibilities for many members who already contribute to a common will and experience an intimate connection to school and home and new opportunities for those who do not. These could be places where insiders and outsiders in the community meet, discuss, and consider what each other has to offer the community and how each other's similarities and differences can positively impact the community as they are accommodated in the school and the community settings.

Increased interactions may contribute to a continued and reinforced cohesion of community, provide additional opportunities for members of the community to reinforce the values and norms of the community, and consider its rules for conduct in the community within the context of change. Increased interactions will increase social capital and strengthen the school-community relationship. Through these increased interactions, members may be able to use a new media center and an old auditorium as places to come together for celebrating community, acknowledging what Jack Shelton calls the "genius of place," sharing common memories and experiences, all the while listening to new voices and seeing new, diverse perspectives, all within an embrace of the "big family" of community.

Discussion of the Research Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between a small, rural school and its surrounding community. To do this, I chose a qualitative research design that incorporated an image-based approach for data collection and representation. This study was an interpretive and descriptive case study bounded by time. The case is a school-community relationship and its subcases are participant students and teachers from the selected small rural school and participant members from the surrounding community. The research methodology for the case study part of the research employed an image-based data collection process and data representation, using strategies of participant-produced photography, photoelicitation (in the forms of photofeedback and photointerviewing), and photoessay. For data analysis, I used within-case and cross-case analysis strategies. For the representation of the within-case analysis, I created public photoessays with data themes that emerged from participants' private photoessays. For the cross-case analysis, I presented excerpts from private photoessays and created collages to represent data themes common to participants and data excerpts to represent individual themes and responses. Data excerpts included participant-produced photographs, written feedback to those photos (photofeedback, a form of photoelicitation) and transcribed oral responses to those photos (during photointerviewing, another form of photoelicitation). Data came from employing an image-based method of collection, namely through the use of photography. In addition, I collected data in the form of photographs (produced by me), historical accounts, demographic texts, and local, and popular accounts to create a "story" of Woody Gap School. For representation of the story of Woody Gap School, I used Tuchman's (1994) suggestion to create a "montage" of its history and context, while embedding it in Van Maanen's (1988) suggested "impressionist" style of storytelling.

Talking about Photography as a Research Tool: Implications for Research and Practice

As discussed earlier (in Chapter 3), photography can assist in bringing a participant's memories, emotions, and sense-making to the surface as he or she shares and discusses his or her experiences with others. When a participant creates his or her own photograph, the photograph can take on more significance and the power of the researcher is reduced. The experience in using strategies that involve photography for data collection and representation has been an exciting one. Not only did participants use cameras for data collection, but I did as well. Now that it is "over" (is it ever really over?), I relate some of my observations and considerations of this tool for research and present them as implications for using this methodology for research and practice.

Considering my use of the camera in practical terms and for research was part of an endeavor to be reflexive about my thinking as a field researcher throughout the entire study and to be deliberate in my discussions and methodology. In the field, I attempted to journal through my methodological quandaries, frustrations, and insights. As I have already mentioned (in Chapter 3), this did not always provide concrete answers for the research dilemmas I faced within this study, but it helped to inform my thinking. A great deal of my thinking time was taken up with the "crisis of decision," making choices about the camera as a research tool that impacted my practical and theoretical selves. The following discussions are my reflections on and considerations of the use of photography as a research tool in the field.

Disclaiming the photograph. For some reason, Susan Sontag's (1977) seminal work, On Photography, stayed on my bookshelf all the while I researched and considered the use of photography as a data collection tool for my dissertation research. When I came to the decision that I *would* use an image-based approach in the field, I immediately ordered this book that is so often cited, quoted, and discussed by visual anthropologists and sociologists. I put it away for a later read. It was not until I was actually collecting data that I sat down and opened up her little collection of essays: I was amazed. She spoke directly to the ethical, practical, and theoretical conflicts that I was either experiencing or needing to consider as a researcher who was creating and looking at photographs. So strongly did I resonate to her writing that I felt a compulsion to relegate other researchers' discussions to a secondary status. At this point, she was the one.

Throughout her essays on photography, Sontag raises questions of power, aggression, representation, and purpose around the act of photography and the use of the photographic image. While I am convinced that the use of photography for data collection has merit for my own research purposes, I cannot ignore the troubled waters that rush in from the mere act of picking up a camera and creating photographs. In an attempt to make better sense of this complex, yet rich, method for looking and thinking about experience, I would like to "talk" to some of Sontag's passages from these essays, using this talk as a device for helping me wade through and express some of the complexities that come from researching through picture making.

Sontag:

> *A photograph—any photograph—seems to have a more innocent, and therefore more accurate, relation to visible reality than do other mimetic objects. Virtuosi of the noble image like Alfred Stieglitz and Paul Strand, composing mighty, unforgettable photographs decade after decade, still want, first of all, to show something "out there" (p. 6).*

So what kinds of photographs did I take at Woody Gap School and for what purpose? Going into the field, I thought I knew the answer to these questions: I would take photographs that would provide a contextual setting of Woody Gap School in the unincorporated town of Suches, Georgia. Here, in the "Valley Above the Clouds," I would make pictures that would allow others to "see" what it was like to be in this setting—the day to day routines, the closeness, the intimacies, the familial bonds that came from students, teachers, and administrators spending great amounts of time with a very small group of people. I had "visions" of photographs that would show school kids with their arms intertwined and their heads bent towards each other as they shared closely-guarded secrets; groups of students in intimate settings, helping each other to accomplish the challenging task they were all so engrossed in; a teacher pulling her chair up close to the three or four students in her classroom in order to lead a discussion in a topic that held their rapt attention. In fact, I did take photographs of these fantasized vignettes (was I able to capture these because I had already seen them in my head and was "on the lookout" for them? Probably, it's really impossible to say).

But this quest to document an "experience" of being at Woody Gap with a camera was complex. It was more than just taking idyllic pictures and innocently talking to people about their photos. I had to think about what I was doing. My "method" involved a decision every time I acted with a camera. To snap or not to snap? Coupled with this decision of yes, no, were questions of why and how? Am I taking this photo because it is esthetically pleasing and will shed a "good light" on Woody Gap School? Does it appeal to me artistically (what Sontag calls the "surreal")? Are they aware of me? Will this photo "say" anything once I have it in hand? Will others think that this is a good picture? Do I zoom in? Should I wait? What exposure works best? Should I use color or black and white film? And of course, as I recorded images, I certainly was thinking about what I saw. I had opinions, questions, reactions—sometimes that is what guided me in taking a photo—or not taking a photo. Sometimes I didn't or couldn't stop to ask why I was taking a photo. I just "had" to take it.

Sontag:

> *To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and, therefore, like power (p. 4).*

I entered Woody Gap School my first day and carefully placed my camera bag on my new desk. I would not be taking pictures in the school today. Using John Collier's idea of "softly push-push" meant that I would slowly introduce my use of the camera on the research site, so that, after awhile, those around me would become so used to the sight of my camera around my neck that they would ignore it and the act of photographing; eventually my camera would be seen simply as another appendage to my body—sometimes attached to my neck, sometimes attached to my face.

So, instead, of snapping pictures, I worked to make my newly assigned space, the computer lab, as welcoming as possible. This would be my "home," a journalistic term that signifies that this is the place where informants and visitors can count on finding you when they want to talk and visit (it works!). Eventually, I hung my camera around my neck (Sontag would observe that I have acquired a symbol of power), and took a stroll around the small campus. It felt absurd, having this tool dangling from my neck with no intention of using it (at different times, later, the camera hanging around my neck would become an albatross, a medal, a backstage pass, a mirror, a green light, a weapon, a toy, an identification badge, a barrier). Yet, even though I never once lifted the camera to my eye that day, those I encountered still reacted to its presence, usually with a startle or recoil, sometimes, uttering an, "Oh…" They checked their postures, hid their faces, or changed their facial expressions. Some just waited expectedly: They had been told that I was there to take a lot of pictures; they might have been waiting patiently to take their medicine, trying to get it over with.

Sontag:

> *Even when photographers are most concerned with mirroring reality, they are still haunted by tacit imperatives of taste and conscience. In deciding how a*

> *picture should look, in preferring one exposure to another, photographers are always imposing standards on their subjects (p. 6).*

In some ways, it is fortunate it that I am not a good photographer. I have some knowledge about how a camera works and that I need to consider film speed, exposure time, distance, focus, and the contrast between shadow and highlight. But I found that while I was in the field, I was impatient. And often, I became caught up in framing and snapping what I saw and not thinking too much about the end result or whether it was "a good picture." But did I impose standards on what I was photographing? Certainly, absolutely.

From the start of my research, I felt compelled to work through how to take pictures; matters of taste and conscience were always at work. After a few days of grabbing my camera whenever I saw something of "interest," and trying to hurriedly capture it on film, I began to feel an immense dissatisfaction. It didn't feel right—it was too helter skelter, too sloppy. I had to think too much about what it mean for something to be considered of "interest" and too worried about what others might consider to be interesting. So I devised a system—I called it "making rounds." Everyday at noon, I would walk the campus and take a few photos. In addition to noon rounds, I would make "rotation rounds": every day I started out at a particular time taking photos, each day being different. The first morning, I started at 7:30, the next day, 8:30, and so on, giving me some semblance of order. This new approach gave me comfort. I was being more like a researcher, more methodical in my work. This way I would be less likely to miss observing particular school or classroom routines and activities. I might even be able to consider these photos for constructing a pictorial essay illustrating "A Day at Woody Gap School." With this anchor, I felt comfortable in supplementing these routine photographs with more impromptu shots, special events, or particular places of scrutiny like the school's front foyer or at the end of the hall by the boys bathroom. Even with this freedom and the frequency of using the camera, I do not feel that I did a particularly "good" job documenting what it was like to be in Woody Gap School or its community. I am not satisfied with the results, with my skill, or my collection of photographs.

Interestingly, when participants sat down with me to discuss their own photographs, each commented on the poor quality of the photograph—the poor exposure, the framing of the subject, the miscalculations. Even though each was assured that the quality of the photograph was not the point of the activity and that the photographs were just fine, each participant was compelled to apologize for "bad" photographs.

Sontag:

> *Images which idealize are no less aggressive than work which makes a virtue of plainness. There is an aggression implicit with every use of the camera (p. 7).*

Once I reflected on what happened during rounds, I realized that I had still not solved the problem. Leaving the computer lab at an appointed time still did not really direct me in when to lift the camera to my eye, when to put it down, or where to aim it. Walking down the hall, I would often just point and shoot, trying to eliminate that crisis of decision, but that in of itself was a decision. One time, I lifted the camera to my eye just as a teacher was scolding a student (a rare occasion) and as I prepared to snap the picture, the student bent his head down, looking so dejected. Would I be his advocate or his betrayer in taking that photo? I had to use a flash, so they would know that I had pressed the shutter. What would be their reaction? I wasn't willing to risk finding out, so I lowered my camera back to my chest. So now I don't have a picture of a dejected-looking student to go with my picture of a group of smiling students. And I have to ask myself, in the context of Sontag's assertation that, "images which idealize are no less aggressive," what have I done with this power to protect and to expose?

Data Collection: Types of Photographs.

Even if I chose not to use any of the photographs I produced while in the field for this study, I still consider my use of the camera in the field to be beneficial for my thinking about photography as a research tool. I found that because I constantly held a camera in my hand, some of the participants in the study seemed to feel a common bond, for they too were using cameras, and they would talk to me about their photographs and their thinking before they had finished the activity (I would nod and listen, refraining from comment . . .). Others in the research setting used my interest in photographs as a means for approaching me. Often, members in the school and the community would show me old photographs, yearbooks, community histories, wallet photos of family, or photographs of recent outings or celebrations. At the General Store, the owner discussed with me his photographs hanging on the wall of the CCC workers who helped to build Woody Gap School. A local history buff invited me into her home to see family photos displayed on her living room wall, photos that included her great-grandparents and old homeplace. Students would sometimes bring editions of the school newspaper to me and point out photos of people they knew or direct me to digital photos archived for the school. In the computer lab, where I was housed, there were 20 or so photo albums with school photographs from the last twenty-five years. Staff and students would sometimes sit with these albums and me and reminisce about those they recognized. The presence of the camera gave me entrée into the school setting and was a common link that connected me with members of the school and community and with my participants. Here I discuss types of photographs I took as a researcher and participant-observer in the field and types of photographs participants took as they endeavored to help me explore the school and community relationship.

Researcher: Three Kinds of Photos. In addition to seeing the above types of photographs, I produced photographs of my own. As I did so, I realized that I was not simply just "taking pictures." I was thinking specifically about kinds of photographs to take. For example, I discussed in one of my journal entries the kinds of photographs I found myself taking while attempting to document the "experience" of being at Woody Gap School:

> I realized that I am taking three types of pictures: prompts to help me remember my experiences, photos for thinking about the events--more along the lines of phenomenology, and "art" photos. Some of these are combined. As I wandered about taking pictures, I would stop and think, "Why take this shot?" Sometimes, I would think, "Well, this will remind me of the infusion of religion into the

> school" or "Hmmm, the Coke machine is reflecting in the menu board--it looks really interesting while at the same time it will be a photo I might be able to speak to." Sometimes, I picked up the camera to my eye, paused, and then changed my mind: it might have been because the frame I chose seemed redundant--I had already taken a shot that was similar; the lighting was so poor that it wouldn't make; or I just didn't feel the *urge* or the need to record what was in front of me--the same as when a researcher decides to not write something down that he or she has observed. Just like the good book says, the researcher is the instrument, even when there is a camera in use. (Sampson, 2000)

Prompt photos: these were photographs used for describing Woody Gap and Suches. These worried me, for two reasons. One, I was aware that the photographs I took seemed to give a smaller-than-life picture of the school. The whole is greater than the parts: pictures of parts of the school or isolated areas were often unappealing in appearance. The photos I took didn't really capture the affection, the intimacy of the school, or the calm. Photos would be examined out of context. For example, the photo of the inschool suspension room (see Figure 9) shows a room in disarray, neglect. For some, this photo may be disturbing sight, even sad. But to me, it is a symbol of a benefit of a small school: low incidences of violence or misbehavior. The room is neglected because it is rarely needed. The second reason I was worried is because photographs I took might over romanticize the setting. I may have refrained from taking a photograph because it could cast the school in a negative light; it didn't intrigue me; or, most importantly, because I had identified my setting, I felt a duty to protect those who so warmly and trustingly invited me into their school home.

Photos of events: Photos I took that were "along the lines of 'phenomenology'" were action shots of the doing of school: reading, eating lunch, playing, chatting, etc. The problem with taking these shots was that I once again felt to be the intruder and so,in trying to take a shot of something "happening," I would often hesitate, wait too long, or stop altogether. On the other hand, the presence of the camera would sometimes influence the actions of the actors. The might exaggerate their motions or their interactions, but most often, they were bashful and would recoil or stop what they were doing. When this happened I felt badly, that I had spoiled a moment or insulted those involved. This dilemma lessened as I was in the school longer and members came to know me and to expect my camera.

"Art" photographs: taking photographs for fun or to capture the strange was a stress release for me. I was able to untense my jaw and consider objects rather than actions or people around me. It wasn't until I attempted this project, did I realize that I am very shy about taking photos of people: I would often feel like a voyuer and an intruder. Taking photos of the inanimate was a chance for me to get privacy.

Photographing the school and community settings and its members constantly demanded that I pay attention. The camera became my notepad. It slowed me down and helped me to frame what was happening in front of me. Rather than having to bend down to scribble notes, I was able to keep my head up and looking at the scene. Of course, as Berger, Sontag, Walker and others have argued, photographs alone are not enough. Narrative is necessary to put those photographs into context. So notetaking was not eliminated. I journaled every day.

Participants: Private photographs as keys to memory and understanding. My purpose in using photography for research was to find a way to "get at" information and perspectives participants had that traditional interviewing may not reach. I used photography because I had come to think that there are some particular advantages of its use over more conventional approaches. One advantage is that participants are themselves data collectors. Holding the camera, a participant is in control of the process, for deciding what it is she or he wishes to share with the researcher and for what reason. Berger (1991) calls these photographs "private" photographs. It is the photograph of the individual's own choosing, thinking, and making. He or she alone may know why it has importance for him or her. The private photo is surrounded by meaning and cannot be understood without "engaging subjectivities" (Walker, 1993, p. 83). John Collier (Collier

& Collier, 1986) called this tapping into memory and understandings with photographs the "can-opener effect." It is not the content of a participant-produced photograph that is important, but what the participant finds to write and say about the photograph that is meaningful. As Walker and Collier suggest, I looked at participants' private photographs as keys to memory and understanding, rather than facts. The image is not important but what is made of the image and the relationship with it. My questions were not about photographs as records so much as about the ways in which they are used to explain and relate what participants perceive.

Participants: Duplicate photographs. In an earlier discussion, I related how some students in a pilot study (see Chapter 3) took duplicate photographs for their photoessays. I saw this again in this study; several participants created duplicate photographs of particular places or objects. Two participants created duplicate photographs because they had different things to write and say about the same image. For example, one person took two photographs of the school's gymnasium, assigning to one image, a caption about a school function, and to the other similar image, a caption about a community function. Another participant took multiple photos of one place s/he felt strongly about, writing a more detailed caption and talking longer about that group of photos than s/he did with any single photograph. Even when participants produced photos that were similar to another photograph in their pack, they would often hold each one of these similar photos and continue to talk about them during the photointerview. This seemed to give a participant time or opportunity to reflect on a subject, event, or concept that s/he had not touched on earlier or to revisit a topic s/he had touched on only briefly.

Participants: Mental Photographs. This was the most exciting phase of the photointerviewing process for me. At the end of each photointerview, I would ask each participant, "Are there any photographs that you did not take or were unable to take that you wish you had?" Most times, participants would either return to a subject discussed earlier during the interview ("Like I said, I wish I had gotten a better picture of the stage because...") or would enter into a new area of discussion ("It's been on my mind the whole time that I should have taken a picture of...") In several cases, the response to this question of the untaken photograph would produce more text than any other single photograph. Perhaps participants talked more about these "mental" photographs because they had already had opportunities to "think" with cameras, to write about their thinking, and to talk and think more during the photointerviews. In being asked to make mental pictures, participants, unfettered by a physical camera, might have been able to better visualize and to reach further in their thinking; they could make connections to and extensions of what they had already produced, as they considered what those pictures might be and why they are important to them. This results of this device of the mental photograph lend weight to the contention that it is not the content of the participant-produced photograph that is of most importance in this study, but what the "photograph" unlocks for the participant, be that photograph a literal product or a mental product.

Participants: The photo erased. When I first used photography as a research tool, I found myself in an uneasy position. As I gathered data about my own teaching experiences, I was literally showing and discussing places where I had had experiences that were not all positive or constructive. My responses to my photographs were often critical, and I was very nervous sharing this with my peers and with my mentors. They knew the places I had photographed and critiqued. A fictional name for the place wouldn't work. You could *see* where I was talking about. The same was true for some of the discussions and photographs that came out of students' photoessays in the pilot study I did with sixth graders. They critiqued people who inhabited the rooms they had photographed. We could not display these without risk of retribution or hard feelings.

During this study, the problem again presented itself. Photographs can be dangerous because they literally show without edit. And when the photographs are of a research setting that is already quite intimate, readers familiar with the setting may figure out what's what without much detective work. In retrospect, I would not change my approach to engaging participants in the production of photographs. I wouldn't want to stymie the process. But at the time, when I began to consider several photographs as “dangerous,” I was concerned. What the participant had to say was important, and I did not want to omit it. So, to protect others and the participant, I erased the two most dangerous photographs and, instead, presented the data that came out of the participant's responses to the photographs along with an empty text box representing those photographs. In this way, the participant's discussion was left in tact while the participant and others were protected. Once again, it is not the content of the participant-produced photograph that is of most importance for this study, but the responses that come out of the prompt of the photograph.

Data Management

Participants produced photographs and responded to those photographs. Their responses (photoelicitation) were in written (photofeedback) and oral (photointerviewing) forms. Participant-produced photographs were scanned into a computer and along with photofeedback and transcribed oral responses to photointerviewing, combined to create private photoessays. Photographs, negatives, and disks with transcribed responses and photofeedback were placed in a safety deposit box. From there, I worked with the data on the computer and back-up copies. Once private photoessays were created with the computer, data management was not difficult.

Data Analysis

A with-in and cross-case analysis was used for data analysis. I used a constant-comparative method with a thematic organizer to reduce data and to assist my search for themes. The organization, and then, the presentation of data themes is my interpretation of what I saw, heard, and considered throughout the study. During analysis, I struggled with some responses as I considered where or why they might fit in a particular theme It presented a problem that I worked through by assigning data to the theme that seemed a best fit.

Two considerations for data analysis reflect back to the data collection stage. Simply, I now believe the concept of "relationship" between school and community was somewhat too abstract for the student participants. I observed student participants to be very thoughtful and conscientious students, active in a variety of school and community activities. Looking back at Dempsey's and Tucker's (1991) admonition that participants should have high levels of problem-solving skills if rich interpretations are to be gained, I would vouch for these as meeting the criteria for their age and experience. And while I do consider the data collected by and from participants to be powerful and very important to the study, I do not feel that I did an adequate job of conveying the purpose of the study to them. Perhaps the warm-up activity could have helped along the explanation of purpose if I had structured it around an activity that directly addressed the concept of relationship, rather than leaving it as an exercise with no structure. In addition, I do not believe I gave them adequate time for data collection (they were very busy people). It may be that they needed more time because they were busy, but it might also have been because the notion of photographing school and community was difficult for them. Or it could be vice versa, not enough time for data collection resulted in an abbreviated discussion of school and community. Hopefully, if the latter was true, more mental pictures would have "developed."

Data Representation

Practically, graphics in the form of scanned photographs take up a tremendous amount of memory and disk space on a computer. The with-in case findings chapter alone filled almost an entire zip disk (100 megabytes of memory, around 70 floppy disks). If I had it to do over again, I would learn more about desktop publishing and the use of graphics programs. As it was, editing was difficult. For example, every time I needed to move a photo in a chapter of almost 150 pages, practically all the photographs would shift, resulting in photos overlaying text or reappearing on other pages. Embedding photographs along with other data also created a problem of continuity and flow from page to page: if there isn't room at the bottom of the page for the photograph, it must be moved to the top of the next page, leaving an undesirable amount of blank space. Whenever this problem occurred I would try to make adjustments by slightly reducing the size of some photographs.

Despite the practical difficulties of using photographs embedded throughout the text, I am convinced that the use of photoessays, created by participants' photographs and their responses to them allowed me to learn much more about a school and community relationship than I would have just talking about it with them. Participants made their own choices. They were able to reflect constantly on these choices and about their experiences and beliefs, as they produced photographs, recorded photofeedback, and participated in photointerviews; participants had time to think about what they know and feel about the school and community relationship. The resulting public photoessays presented are data arranged by the researcher, but initially created by the participant. This methodology can serve to reduce the role of the researcher and provide a forum for these members of the school and the community as to show their thinking.

Researcher Biases

At the beginning of this study, my biases stemmed from personal theories developed as a result of my experiences as a rural educator and from my thinking and discussions of the literature on rural education policy, school size, communities, and rural reform efforts. Namely, that I went into the field believing that small schools located in the rural communities they serve are beneficial and productive arrangements of schooling for students and members of the community. Since returning from the field and having analyzed and considered the data collected there, my biases have been tempered somewhat. I still strongly purport that small community schools are vital to the livelihood of rural communities and should be acknowledged as settings with unique characteristics that reflect the community. I would not purport that the characteristics of being small and being located in the community are enough to build a strong community relationship that at the same time conscientiously includes perspectives from diverse viewpoints within its arrangement.

My biases also come from my work in the field, having spent eight weeks with a small group of people in an intimate and isolated setting. The people I met there welcomed me with complete trust and an openness that was heartwarming and impossible to dismiss. During my two months there, I spent a lot of time talking and visiting with members, and it was impossible to not feel affection for them.

Most researchers don't name the sites of their research. For this study I did name my research setting. If I had not identified the school by name, this school's identity would be easy to discover. Woody Gap School is the only K-12 school in the state of Georgia. It is the state's smallest, the only school that is designated as "isolated" by the Legislature and the only school to receive a sparsity grant from the state as a result. There is a vulnerable condition in being identified, and I feel a responsibility to respond to this vulnerability.

The time I spent in the field was also a time of personal change for me, change that thrust me into the role of the "outsider" after living in the same community for over 20 years, as one of my journal entries reports:

> May 11. A kind of melancholy has settled in over me this morning. I realize that I am receiving e-mails are from places where I no longer work (the League office, the Middle Grades Program, the Elementary Ed Department, Oglethorpe County Middle School); places where I don't yet work (Reinhardt College), or where I am ex-officio (Woody Gap School). I have things in my office at UGA, where I no longer visit; haven't been given a new office at Reinhardt to call my own, and sit at a temporary desk in the computer lab at Woody Gap (not that I am complaining, I appreciate the generous gesture—it just isn't "my space"). I am staying in one room at a B&B in Dahlonega during the week, am selling and moving from my beloved home in Athens, but still don't have access to my new home in Dahlonega. I am going crazy. I thought this would be an invigorating and liberating experience, and most of the time it is, but sometimes it is lonely and unsettling. As the researcher, I am always at arm's length. And, of course, this is as it should be….I am the outsider trying to peer in.

It's possible that in being uprooted, I became more sensitive to the condition of being an outsider. It is also possible that my enthusiasm for my new community (for I was happy about the move) that was located relatively near the setting, endeared me even more to the Woody Gap and Suches, as my new "neighbors."

But, biased as I am, I did not run away from the tough issues that emerged in the study or from my participants' discussion of those issues. I tried to keep my feelings and affections as bracketed as possible, and as a rural teacher, parent, and political citizen, this was not always an easy feat.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study was an exploration of a relationship between an isolated school in Northeast Georgia and its surrounding community. The resulting description of this relationship adds to the rural education literature base of knowledge on rural schools and school cultures that DeYoung (1994) holds "remains amazingly underdeveloped" (p. 2). An unorthodox tool for data collection and representation was used for the study. Image-based research, photography, was employed by participants to collect data for the discussion of the relationship between school and community.

Image-Based Research

As discussed earlier (see Chapter 3), the use of photography as a research tool is not used by many researchers. Those who do use it (Dempsey & Tucker, 1991; Harper, 1994; Prosser & Schwartz, 1998; Schratz & Steiner-Loffler, 1998; Walker, 1993) do so because photographs trigger recall; they have a "can-opener" effect for getting at participants' understandings. I have used photography to reflect on my own experiences, and found the use of them powerful for thinking about experience and how I reconstruct it in particular settings.

With new technological advances, cameras are now more accessible than ever to the public. Digital and disposable cameras are convenient methods for amateur photography buffs to record images. Familiarity with cameras reduces participant anxiety and the use of photography is less expensive and has a faster turn around time for development. These factors lend themselves to the use of cameras in research for data collection, particularly with children in the schools. The use of photography as a research tool may help children explore their perceptions about their own schooling experiences like the students in the Schratz and Steiner-Loffler (1998) study and my pilot study did. Other research employing this research methodology may explore devices of mental photographs, the photo erased, and private photographs (Berger, 1980). Research on considerations of the camera as a tool in research, issues such as time, crisis of decision, skill, and the impact of the camera on action, could provide useful information for the researcher.

Small Rural Schools

Many of the schools in the United States are located in rural areas and small towns. In the state of Georgia, most of the state's rural schools are on large campuses, removed from the communities they serve. Woody Gap School is an exception to this rule because of its isolation in the southern part of the Appalachian Mountains. It has not had to face the economies-of-scale approach to schooling that occurs when smaller schools are consolidated. It enjoys an intimate setting where its students are well known by each other and by the school's staff. Dropout rates are low and attendance rates are high. And although the school's test scores are not above the national or state average across the school, it does have a population of students who excel. In addition, the school, last year, ranked among the top in the state in the percentage of students who past the Georgia High School Graduation Test. Woody Gap School is one intensive example. More research is needed on small rural schools that have managed to be successful in schooling while maintaining its school and community relationship. In the state of Georgia, those schools will be harder to come by, as small rural schools are fewer and fewer. Additional research on the small school and community relationship in the rural setting is needed for making comparisons to what has already been researched, for example, this study.

In light of the discussions presented in this study, research is needed to explore models of small rural schools that have designed the school experience to provide students with a strong sense of community while gaining exposure to diverse cultural perspectives, traditions, and practices.

As a comparison to the small school and community relationship, research might explore what happens to the relationship between school and community when the school is relegated to a campus out of the community. How do the school and community build a relationship when the partners are literally far apart from each other? How does the relationship between the small school and its community differ between urban and rural settings?

School Consolidation

Although this study did not address school consolidation directly, the practice of consolidation as a method for rural education reform is an underlying factor for doing this research. As schools have grown larger and larger, students, staff, and parents have found them to be impersonal places lacking the intimacy and sense of belonging some small schools provide. Georgia has very few small schools left. What happens within the walls of these few remaining schools and their communities need to be explored and described. In other states, large city school districts are beginning to attend to research that suggests that small school arrangements may enact more effective forms of change. For example, districts in Seattle, New York, and Chicago have initiatives in place for building smaller schools to improve attendance and behavior. Research needs to look at what happens when large schools break into smaller schools.

K-12 Units of Schooling

Prior to entering the research field, the arrangement of the school for this study was not a large part of consideration of the school and the community relationship, but it is an important part of Woody Gap's organization. Research comparing the level of community involvement in the K-12 rural school and other arrangements of rural schooling may be helpful for studying rural school and community relationships.

A Conversation at the General Store: Broader Implications

Rather than succumbing to the uncomfortable task of creating a list of implications possibly perceived as an extrinsic prescriptive for reform (this would be an ironic turn considering that part of the purpose of this study was to trouble the practice of reform that ignores the uniqueness of small school settings), I prefer to approach this discussion of broader implications for further research as a catalyst for a conversation, one that might take place sitting at the round table in the front of the Suches General Store. My goal here is to highlight some of the larger issues that came out of this study and that bear consideration for future research in rural education and school size.

Setting the stage for our conversation, I envision asking members from any school—teachers, students, staff—and members from any community—school board members, volunteers, parents, retirees, politicians, researchers, and others to join me at the table. As we settle in for our chat, I would ask them to talk with me about issues emerging from this study that have implications for research and policy. We might discuss what it means to be an insider and outsider in a rural community; what are the dynamics of living in a community—how they impact the individual versus the group; what happens when an individual leaves the community and then later returns to contribute to the community's social capital; how can a school's curriculum include an appreciation for individual differences in its curriculum while recognizing that change has to emerge naturally and from within the community; what is the role of schools in building social capital for their communities; and how might small schools continue to retain faculty members, foster a family atmosphere and extend that atmosphere into the community. As rural scholars, researchers, and policy makers seek to add to the knowledge base about the benefits and challenges of small school settings, they should recognize that the communities schools form and the communities they serve are subtle, complicated, and dynamic organisms with their own unique characteristics and needs.

Conclusion

Woody Gap School is a community school located in the heart of Suches, an unincorporated area in the mountains of Northeast Georgia. An isolated small school in a rural setting, it educates around 100 students, kindergarten through twelfth grade. As a center in the community, the school is able to provide a place for community members to congregate, to participate in activities, and to interact among members of different generations. Woody Gap School is also a stage for the community to practice intergenerational closure, the transmitting of mutual understandings of the community values by older members of the community who keep vigilant the community's rules for conduct. The adherence to the rules by its members creates cohesion for the community, a common will. Sometimes, the common will of the group may be so strong, that a member in the school or community may feel like an outsider, and sometimes he or she may feel excluded because of his or her differences. Members may transmit the values of the community through modeling or reinforcement. Often, modeling or reinforcement takes place through interactions between school and community members, usually at the school setting. Examples of interactions include community support of the school, observances of school activities, holidays, and traditions, and mutual reliance. Mutual reliance is an example of social capital. Social capital is built when an interaction between community members provides a mutual benefit for the school and the community.

The community has not been deprived of its school like so many other communities over the years. Like other rural schools, Woody Gap School struggles to educate its students with sparse resources and population. When mutual reliance is practiced, the school and the community benefit by saving resources and being less dependent on outside, more expensive services. Some participants expressed visions for the future of the relationship between Woody Gap School and its community as another example of mutual reliance between school and community: the reclamation of the school's old auditorium and the construction of a new media center to serve the school and the community.

This picture represents an empty room. If the Woody Gap School were not in Suches the community would die. It's hard to separate the community from the school because of the close knit relationship of place and people. The community members are fully committed to keeping this place. Woody Gap School is the community and the community is Woody Gap School. Generations of families have gone to school here. Students feel a kinship to the spirit that lives on here. After graduation, they remember their time and place with fond memories for many years.

REFERENCES

Adelman, C. (1998). Photocontext. In J. Prosser (Ed.), Image-based research: A sourcebook for qualitative researchers (pp. 148-161). London: Falmer Press. Annenberg Rural Challenge (1995).

Anderson, G. L. (1998). Toward authentic participation: Deconstructing the discourses of participatory reforms in education. American Educational Research Journal, 35 (4), 571--603.

Annenberg Rural Challenge: An introduction and invitation (1995). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 391 623).

Annual Staff (1991). Woody Gap School: Fiftieth anniversary edition. [Yearbook] Suches, GA.

Appalachian Educational Laboratory (1999). Five rural themes. Rural Specialty [On-line], Available: http://www.ael.org/rel/rural/rurlthem.htm

Archives of Union County (2000). [On-line], Available: http://ngeorgia.com/county/union.html

Banks, M. (1995). Visual research methods. Social Research Update, 11 (2), 1-6.

Bateson, G. & Mead, M. (1942). Balinese character: A photographic analysis. New York: New York Academy of Sciences.

Berger, J. (1980). About looking. New York: Vintage International.

Berger. J., & Mohr, J. (1982). Another way of telling. New York: Vintage International.

Berry, W. (1993). Sex, economy, and community: Eight essays. New York: Parthenon Books.

Boatright, S. R., & Bachtel, D. C. (Eds.). (1998). The Georgia county guide (17th ed.). Athens: The University of Georgia.

Boykin, A. W., Jagers, R. J., Ellison, C. M., & Albury, A. (1997). Communalism: Conceptualization and measurement of an Afrocultural social orientation. Journal of Black Studies, 27 (3), 409-418.

Cahnman, W. J. (1995). Weber and Toennies: Comparative sociology in historical perspective. New Brunswick NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Cawthorn, R. (1988, September 16). Isolated school in the mountains is a world unto itself. The Atlanta-Journal and Constitution, pp. 1A, 9A.

Coleman, J. S. (1987). The relations between school and social structure. In M. Hallinan (Ed.), The social organization of schools: New conceptualizations of the learning process (pp. 177-204), New York: Plenum Press.

Collier, J., Jr., & Collier, M. (1986). Visual anthropology: Photography as a research method. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Collins, C. R., & Devereaux, J. (1976). A pictorial history of Union County, vol. I. Blairsville, GA: Union County Historical Society.

Confederate soldier's grave identification (2000, March). Woody Gap Dispatch, p. 10.

Cooper, N. (1999, May 19). Woody Gap's Old Fashion Day held in Suches. The North Georgia News, p. 8A.

Cotton, K. (1996). Affective and social benefits of small-scale schooling. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 401 088)

Creswell, J. W. (1994). Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Dempsey, J. V., & Tucker, S. A. (1991). Using photo-interviewing as a tool for research and evaluation. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED334 980)

Dewey, J. (1976). John Dewey: The middle works: 1899-1924 (J. Boydston, Ed.). Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

DeYoung, A. J. (1994). Researching rural American schools: Continuing curtural themes and cultural conflicts in the countryside. University of Kentucky (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 366 475)

Edwards, E. (Ed.) (1992). Anthropology and photography 1860-1920. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Erickson, F. (1990). Qualitative methods. In L. S. Shulman (Ed.), Research in teaching and learning (Vol. 2, pp. 77-194). New York: Macmillan.

Fanning, J. (1995). Rural school consolidation and student learning. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 384 484)

Fox, M. (1980). Rural school transportation as a daily constraint in students' lives. Rural Educator, 17(2), 22-27.

Freire, P. (1982). Creating alternative research methods: Learning to do it by doing it. In B. Hall, A. Gillette, & R. Tandon (Eds.), Creating knowledge: A monopoly? Participatory research in development. New Delhi: Society for Participatory Research in Asia.

Friedkin, N., & Necochea, J. (1988). School system size and performance: A contingency perspective. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 10 (3), 237-249.

Geertz, C. (1973). The interpretation of cultures. NY: Basic Books, Inc.

Georgia Department of Education (2001). Georgia public education report card. [On-line]. Available: http://accountability.doe.k12.ga.us/report2000

Gipe, R. (1997, January 6). Rural challenge site visit report.

Glickman, C. D. (1999). School-based authority and responsibility. College of Education, The University of Georgia. Issue paper to the Governor's Education Reform Study Commission; Accountability Committee.

Green, A. (1997). Education, globalization and the nation state. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Goodlad, J. I. (1999). Flow, eros, and ethos in educational renewal. Phi Delta Kappan, 80 (8), 571-578.

Haas, T., & Nachtigal, P. (1998). Place value: An educator's guide to good literature on rural lifeways, environments, and purposes of education. Charleston, WV: Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

Hagaman, D. (1996). How I learned not to be a photojournalist. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Harmon, H. (1997). Rural schools in a global economy. The Link On Line [On-line], 16 (3), 1-3. Available: http://www.ael.org/link/163/lnk16311.htm

Harper, D. (1994). On the authority of image: Visual methods at the crossroads. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.) Handbook of qualitative research (pp. 403-412). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Harrell, B. (1986, September 14). School paper serves whole town. The Atlanta-Journal and Constitution, p. A8

Hedlund, D. (1993). Listening to rural adolescents: Views on the rural community and the importance of adult interactions. Journal of Research in Rural Eduation, 9 (3), 150-159.

Helge, D. (1991). Rural, exceptional, at risk. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (1994). Phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and interpretive practice. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.) Handbook of qualitative research (pp. 262-271). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Howley, C. (1996). Ongoing dilemmas of school size: A short story. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 401 089)

Howley, C. B. (1997a). How to make rural education research *rural*: An essay at practical advice. Journal of Research in Rural Education, 13 (2), 131-138.

Howley, C. (1997b). Dumbing down by sizing up. School Administrator, 54 (9), 24-30.

Howley, C. B., & Bickel, R. (1999). The Matthew Project: National report. Randolph, VT: Rural Challenge.

Howley, & Howley (1995). The power of babble: Technology and rural education. Phi Delta Kappan, 77 (2), 26-31.

Huberman, M. A., & Miles, M. B. (1994). Data management and analysis methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (pp. 428-444). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Jagers, R. J., & Mock, L. O. (1995). The communalism scale and collectivitistic-individualistic tendencies: Some preliminary findings. Journal of Black Psychology, 21 (2), 153-167.

Jodice, J. (1985, September). Woody Gap: The little school that could. Rural Georgia, 41 (9), 4-7, 18.

Khattri, N., Riley, K. W., & Kane, M. B. (1997). Students at risk in poor, rural areas: A review of the research. Journal of Research in Rural Education, 13 (2), 79-100.

Leavell Center for Evangelism and Church Growth (1998). A demographic study of Suches, Georgia. New Orleans: Author.

Levin, R. (1984, December 25). Tradition is personal in little Suches, Georgia. The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, 1A, 15A.

Lippman, L., Burns, S., & McArthur, E. (1996). Urban schools: The challenge of location and poverty (NCES 94-184). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Lunchroom housed in basement (1984-85, March). Woody Gap Dispatch, 9 (3), p. 7.

Manning, P. K., & Cullum-Swan, B. (1994). Narrative, content, and semiotic analysis. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (pp. 463-477). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Martinez-Brawley, E. E. (1990). Perspectives of the small community. Silver Spring, MD: National Association of Social Workers Press.

Maynard, S., & Howley, A. (1997). Parent and community involvement in rural schools. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 408 143)

Merriam, S. B. (1998). Qualitative research and case study applications in education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Merz, C., & Furman, G. (1997). Community and schools: Promise and paradox. New York: Teachers College Press.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. A. (1994). Qualitative data analysis (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Miller, B. A. (1991). Distress and survival: Rural schools, education, and the importance of community. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Miller, B. A. (1995). The role of rural schools in community development: Policy issues and implications. Journal of Research in Rural Education, 11 (3), 163-172.

Miller, W. B. (2000). Bill's guide to Suches (3^{rd} ed.) [Brochure].

Morse, J. M. (1994). Designing funded qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (pp. 220-235). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Moon, J. (1990, November 14). 50 years and counting. The North Georgia News, pp. 1-2.

Nachtigal, P. (1982). Rural school improvement efforts: An interpretive history. In P. Nachtigal (Ed.), Rural education: In search of a better way. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

National Association of State Boards of Education (1996). Rural education: What's down the road for schools? Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Boards of Education.

Noddings, N. (1999). Renewing democracy in schools. Phi Delta Kappan, 80 (8), 579-583.

Parham, J. (1992, May 18). Woody Gap: In a class by itself. Athens Daily News, pp. 1A, 8A.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). Qualitative evaluation methods (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Plecki, M. (1991, April). The relationship between elementary school size and student achievement. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL. (ERIC/CRESS Accession No, RC 019 440)

Prosser, J. (1992). Personal reflections on the use of photography in an ethnographic case study. British Educational Research Journal, 18 (4), 397-411.

Prosser, J. & Schwartz, D. (1998). Photographs within the sociological research process. In J. Prosser (Ed.) Image-based research: A sourcebook for qualitative researchers. London: Falmer Press.

Raudonis, L. (1994) A place where everybody knows your name. Page One, (20) 5, 22-23.

Raywid, M. A. (1999). Current literature on small schools. Eric Digest [On-line], Available: http://www.ael.org/eric/digests/edorc965.htm

Rousseau, M. F. (1991). Community: The tie that binds. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Ruby, J. (1996). Visual anthropology. In D. Levinson & M. Ember (Eds.), Encyclopedia of cultural anthropology (4:1345-1351). New York: Henry Holt & Co.

Rural Challenge (1999). Research: Small schools counter effects of poverty on student achievement (press release). Randolph, VT: author.

Sampson, A. V. (2000). [Journal entries for dissertation study]. Unpublished raw data.

Sampson, A. V. (1999). Cameras don't take pictures, people do: A self-study on experience using photoessay and rhizomatic analysis. Unpublished manuscript, The University of Georgia.

School rolls (1999-2000). Woody Gap School.

Schratz, M., & Steiner-Loffler, U. (1998). Pupils using photography in school self-evaluation. In J. Prosser (Ed.), Image-based research: A sourcebook for qualitative researchers (pp. 235-251). London: Falmer Press

Schratz, M. & Walker, R. (1995). Research as change: New possibilities for qualitative research. London: Routledge.

Seal, K. R. & Harmon, H. L. (1995). Realities of school reform. Viewpoints. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 384 454)

Sergiovanni, T. (1994). Building community in schools. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Shuler, E. L. (1953). Blood Mountain. Jacksonville, FL: Convention Press.

Sontag, S. (1977). On photography. New York: Doubleday.

Stephens, R. E. (1991). A framework for evaluating state policy options for the reorganization of rural, small school districts. Charleston, WV: Appalachia Educational Laboratory.

Stake, R. E. (1994). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (pp. 236-247). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Tadlock, M. (with Barrett-Roberts, J.) (1995). Middle level education in small rural schools. Columbus OH: National Middle School Association.

Theobald, P. G. (1991). Country lifers reconsidered: Educational reform for rural America. Journal of Research in Rural Education, 7 (2), 21-28.

Tuchman, G. (1994). Historical social science: Methodologies, methods, and meanings. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of qualitative research (pp. 306-323). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Turner, J. M. & Parker, B. (Eds.) (1999). Coopers Creek Baptist Church, 1847-1999, Coopers Creek School, 1847-1955: One hundred fifty two years of history. Margret, GA: Coopers Creek Baptist Church.

Tyack, D., & Cuban, L. (1995). Tinkering toward utopia: A century of public school reform. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Union County Heritage Book Committee (1994). The heritage of Union County, Georgia. Waynesville, NC: Don Mills, Inc.

University of the State of New York, Regents of the University (1992). Rural education: Issues and strategies. New York: The State Education Department.

Van Maanen, J. (1988). Tales of the field: On writing ethnography. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

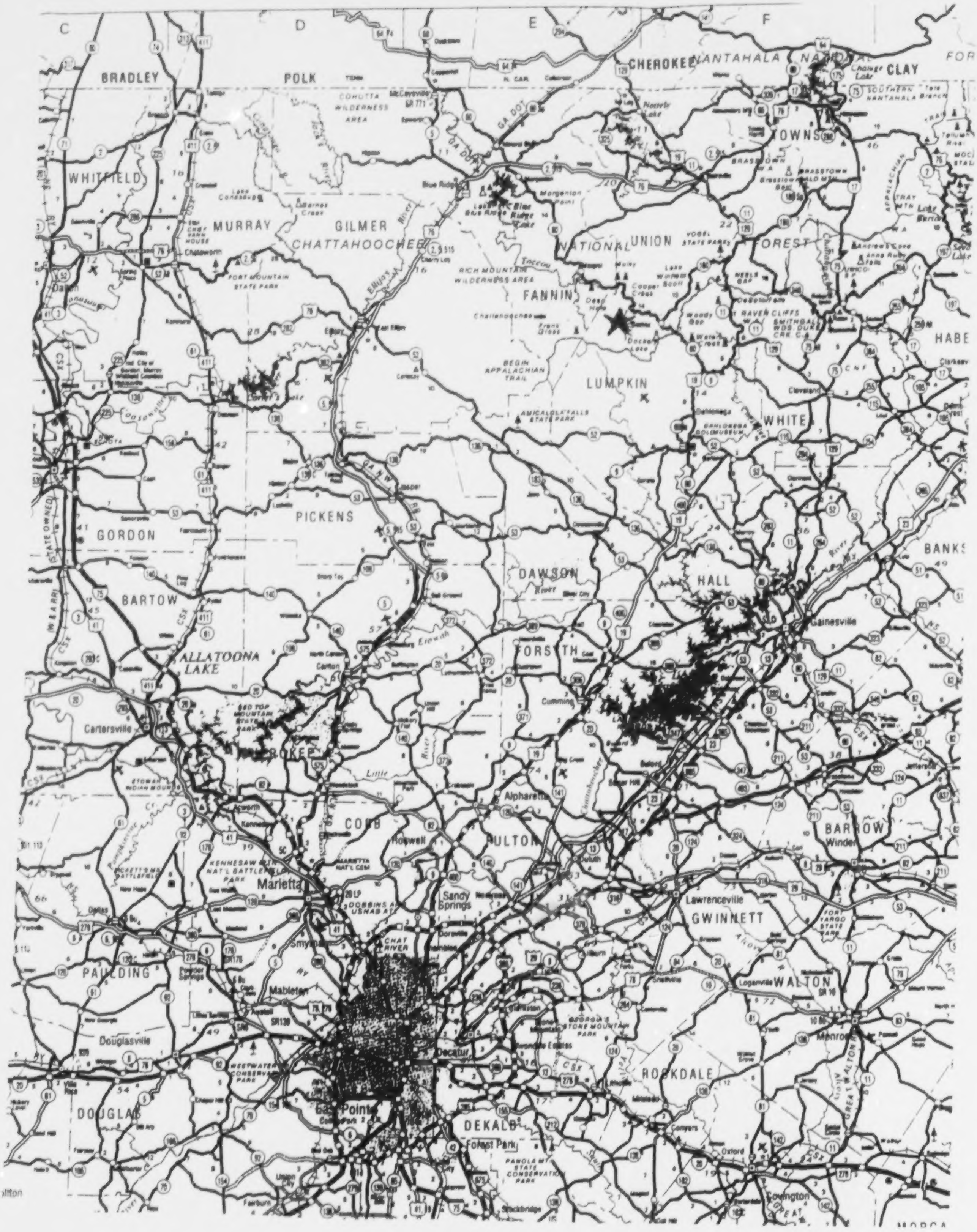
Walker, R. (1993). Finding a silent voice for the researcher: Using photographs in evaluation and research. In M. Schratz (Ed.), Qualitative voices in qualitative research (pp. 72-92).

Woody Gap School (1998). School improvement plan presented to the visiting committee of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Suches, GA: Author.

Woody Gap School /Suches community media center project proposal (1998). Suches, GA: Author.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF THE SUCHES AREA


C
D
E
F
BRADLEY
POLK
CHEROKEE
NANTAHALA NATIONAL
CLAY
COHUTTA WILDERNESS AREA
TOWNS
WHITFIELD
MURRAY
GILMER
CHATTAHOOCHEE
NATIONAL
UNION
FOREST
Blue Ridge
Lake Blue Ridge
Morganton
FORT MOUNTAIN STATE PARK
RICH MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS AREA
FANNIN
Chatsworth
Dalton
Ellijay
BEGIN APPALACHIAN TRAIL
AMICALOLA FALLS STATE PARK
LUMPKIN
WHITE
Dahlonega
Cleveland
HABE
GORDON
PICKENS
Jasper
DAWSON
HALL
BANKS
Gainesville
BARTOW
ALLATOONA LAKE
FORSYTH
Cumming
Cartersville
CHEROKEE
RED TOP MOUNTAIN STATE PARK
ETOWAH INDIAN MOUNDS
Canton
Alpharetta
COBB
FULTON
Roswell
BARROW
Winder
KENNESAW MTN NAT'L BATTLEFIELD PARK
Marietta
DOBBINS AFB USNAS ATL
Sandy Springs
Duluth
Lawrenceville
GWINNETT
PAULDING
Smyrna
Mableton
Powder Springs
WALTON
Loganville
Douglasville
STONE MOUNTAIN PARK
Decatur
ROCKDALE
Monroe
DOUGLAS
DEKALB
Forest Park
Conyers
Covington
PANOLA MT STATE CONSERVATION PARK
Union City
Fairburn
Stockbridge
MORGA

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORMS

Parent Consent Form

I agree to allow my child ____ to take part in a study titled "What is the Relationship Between a Small Rural School in Northeast Georgia and its Surrounding Community?" which is being conducted by Alice Sampson (Elementary Education Department at UGA, 706-542-4244) under the direction of Dr. P. Elizabeth Pate (Elementary Education Department, 706-542-4292). I understand that my child's participation in this study is completely voluntary, and I can choose to withdraw my consent at any time, without giving any reason and without penalty to my child. I can ask to have information related to my child returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this study is to allow Ms. Sampson to describe the influences, identifications (ways in which members see community and school tied together), and interactions between Woody Gap School and its surrounding community.

The benefits that I may expect my child to gain from the study are:

1. Through the use of photography, my child will be given opportunities to document, to reflect, and to consider various aspects of the relationship between Woody Gap School and its community;
2. In addition, he or she will have opportunities to talk about, to evaluate, and to describe what the relationship between school and community is and what it means to him or her; and
3. To display this process of thinking about it through the creation of a public photoessay.
4. Additionally, each participant will have an opportunity to use his or her own individual creative expression through the production of photographs and photoessays.

If my child volunteers to take part in this study, my child will be asked to do the following things:

1. Use a camera provided by Ms. Sampson to create photographs of places, things, events, and activities that he or she thinks represent how school and community are connected (time on task: no more than 2 to 3 hours during a 2 week period);
2. Write about these photographs (time on task: no more than 2 to 3 hours during a 1 week period);
3. Discuss these resulting photographs with Ms Sampson (time on task: 1 to 2 hours in a 1 week period); and
4. If he or she chooses to, create a display of his or her photographs (time on task period depends on interests and choices of participant).

I understand that:

1. Participating in this study will have no effect on my child's schoolwork.

2. My child is not expected to spend more than 2 to 3 hours in a 2 week period to produce photographs;
3. My child is not expected to spend more than 2 to 3 hours in a 1 week period to write about photographs;
4. Ms. Sampson and my child will visit for 1 or 2 meetings (no more than 1 hour long) to discuss photographs;
5. Sessions with my child will be audiotaped;
6. To assure confidentiality, my child's real name will not be used in the study, and Ms. Sampson will not refer to my child's real name when discussing the study.
7. My child may choose whether or not to create a photoessay (this is when the participant's photos and words are matched together to create a display); and
8. Ms. Sampson will allow my child and me to
    - take a final look over my child's photographs,
    - listen to audiotapes of interview(s) with my child,
    - read over the researcher's transcriptions of what my child said said and my child's written responses,
    - remove anything that worries my child or me or causes my child or me to feel uncomfortable, and
    - to add any information that that my child feels is important or necessary to the study.

I understand that Ms. Sampson wants to get this information so that she can study ways my child's school and community are connected and that I can withdraw my child from this study and change my mind about my child speaking with her at any time. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with my child will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your and your child's permission or as required by law.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (706) 542-4244, UGA or (706) 747-2401, Woody Gap School. E-mail: asampson@coe.uga.edu

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree for my child to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Signature of the Investigator (Ms. Sampson)	Date	Parent or Guardian Signature	Date

Please sign one copy and return the other copy to the Ms Sampson.

Research at the University of Georgia which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to Julia Alexander, Institutional Review Board; Office of VP for Research; The University of Georgia, 604 Graduate Studies Research Center; Athens, GA 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514

CONSENT FORM (Student)

I agree to participate in Ms. Sampson's research study for her dissertation requirement. I understand that participation in this study involves:

5. Using a camera provided by Ms. Sampson to create photographs of places, things, events, and activities that I think represent how my school and community are connected;
6. Writing about these photographs;
7. Discussing these resulting photographs with Ms Sampson; and
8. If I choose to, creating a display of my photographs.

I understand that:

9. I am not expected to spend more than 2 to 3 hours in a 2 week period to produce photographs;
10. I am not expected to spend more than 2 to 3 hours in a 1 week period to write about photographs;
11. Ms. Sampson and I will visit for no more than 1 hour for one, possibly two, meetings to discuss photographs;
12. Sessions will be audiotaped;
13. My real name will not be used in the study, and that Ms. Sampson will not refer to my real name when discussing the study.
14. I may choose whether or not I would like to select information I have written or said and my photographs for creating a public display; and
15. Ms. Sampson will allow me to take a final look over my photographs, to read over what I have said and written, to remove anything that worries me or makes me uncomfortable, and to add any information that I feel is important or necessary to the study.

I understand that Ms. Sampson wants to get this information so that she can study ways my school and community are connected and that I can withdraw from this study and change my mind about speaking with her at any time.

Signature of the Investigator Date (Ms. Sampson)	Signature of the Participant Date (student)

Please sign one copy and return the other copy to the Ms Sampson.

Research at the University of Georgia which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to Julia Alexander, Institutional Review Board; Office of VP for Research; The University of Georgia, 604 Graduate Studies Research Center; Athens, GA 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514

Adult Consent Form

I, ____, agree to take part in a study titled "What is the Relationship Between a Small Rural School in Northeast Georgia and its Surrounding Community?" which is being conducted by Alice Sampson (Elementary Education Department at UGA, 706-542-4244) under the direction of Dr. P. Elizabeth Pate (Elementary Education Department, 706-542-4292). I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary, and I can choose to withdraw my consent at any time, without giving any reason and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this study is to allow Ms. Sampson to describe the influences, identifications (ways in which members see community and school tied together), and interactions between Woody Gap School and its surrounding community.

The benefits that I may expect to gain from the study are:

5. Through the use of photography, I will be given opportunities to document, to reflect, and to consider various aspects of the relationship between Woody Gap School and its community;
6. In addition, I will have opportunities to talk about, to evaluate, and to describe what the relationship between school and community is and what it means to me; and
7. To display this process of thinking about it through the creation of a public photoessay.
8. Additionally, I will have an opportunity to use my own individual creative expression through the production of photographs and photoessays.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

9. Use a camera provided by Ms. Sampson to create photographs of places, things, events, and activities that I think represents how school and community are connected (time on task: no more than 2 to 3 hours during a 2 week period);
10. Write about these photographs (time on task: no more than 2 to 3 hours during a 1 week period);
11. Discuss these resulting photographs with Ms Sampson (time on task: 1 to 2 hours in a 1 week period); and
12. If I choose to, create a display of my photographs (time on task period depends on interests and choices of participant).

I understand that:

16. I am not expected to spend more than 2 to 3 hours in a 2 week period to produce photographs;
17. I am not expected to spend more than 2 to 3 hours in a 1 week period to write about photographs;
18. Ms. Sampson and I will visit for 1 or 2 meetings (no more than 1 hour long) to discuss photographs;
19. Sessions with me will be audiotaped;

20. To assure confidentiality, my real name will not be used in the study, and Ms Sampson will not refer to my real name when discussing the study.
21. I may choose whether or not to create a photoessay (this is when the participant's photos and words are matched together to create a display); and
22. Ms. Sampson will provide opportunity for me to
    - take a final look over my photographs,
    - listen to audiotapes of interview(s),
    - read over the researcher's transcriptions of what I said and my written responses,
    - remove anything that worries me or causes me to feel uncomfortable, and
    - to add any information that I feel is important or necessary to the study.

I understand that Ms. Sampson wants to get this information so that she can study ways school and community are connected and that I can withdraw from this study and change my mind about speaking with her at any time. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with me will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with my permission or as required by law.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (706) 542-4244, UGA or (706) 747-2401, Woody Gap School. E-mail: asampson@coe.uga.edu

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Signature of the Investigator Date (Ms. Sampson)	Participant Signature Date

Please sign one copy and return the other copy to the Ms Sampson.

Research at the University of Georgia which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to Julia Alexander, Institutional Review Board; Office of VP for Research; The University of Georgia, 604 Graduate Studies Research Center; Athens, GA 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-6514

APPENDIX C

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PHOTOFEEDBACK

Directions for Responding to Photographs

1. If possible, please use the disk provided and a Microsoft Word processing program. Mac or PC computer is fine.

2. Organize your photos any way you see fit.

3. Please use the Sharpie pen provided to number each photo on the backside.

4. As you write, please begin with the photo number.

5. Feel free to write as much as you would like.

Thank you!

APPENDIX D

EXAMPLE OF PHOTOFEEDBACK

1. Community members support Seniors at Baccalaureate service. Discussing how proud they were of the Seniors.

2. Even the younger students get involved, showing how close everyone in the school and how supportive they are.

3. Gathering of school and community showing their concern for school activities.

4. Memory for me. Also a blessing to be graduating with such wonderful people fact that I know very, well due to our rural community.

APPENDIX E

PHOTOINTERVIEW SCRIPT

Photointerview Script

Starting with Photograph #1:

1. What can you tell me about this particular photograph?
2. How does this photograph represent a school and community relationship?
3. If you could remake this photograph, would you do anything differently? Why?
4. When you took this photograph, what did you think about as you framed it? How did you feel?
5. Why did you decide to take this particular photograph?
6. Is there anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX F

EXAMPLE OF A PRIVATE PHOTOESSAY

1. Community members support Seniors at Baccalaureate service. Discussing how proud they were of the Seniors.

Alice: We are talking today with Joy who has been going to Woody Gap School for 13 years. And, she's going to be talking about her thinking about school and community. And Joy what I am get you to do is to start with picture number one and tell me about it.

Joy: This is a picture of baccalaureate we had and this them discussing, talking about how good the ceremony went and how…

Alice: What church was that?

Joy: Zion Baptist Church.

Alice: And you know who all those ladies are?

Joy: Yes. (She names them)

Alice: How do you know them?

Joy: Her husband (points to one of the women in the picture) goes on these trips with us to old homesites.

Alice: The Walkie-Talkies?

Joy: No.

2. Even the younger students get involved, showing how close everyone in the school and how supportive they are.

Now, this picture shows how involved the little kids are with it. I mean they are not even part of anybody, they're not a sister or brother or anything to any of the graduates, yet they come, because we are so close to them. We know everybody.

Alice: And they want to come support you?

Joy: Yes.

Alice: I've talked to several people in the community who said they are coming to graduation—Ms.—is coming, even though…she just wants to be part of it.

3. Gathering of school and community showing their concern for school activities.

Joy: Yes. And this here, everybody is talking. Everybody knows everybody. The community is there to get together. It's nice that they come out to support us like they do.

Alice: Yes, it is. Is it at different churches every year?

Joy: No, it's usually at this one. We could hold it at another church, but the main reason they have it there is because of the fellowship hall out here is so big and the other churches ain't got one.

4. Memory for me. **Also a blessing to be graduating with such wonderful** people fact that I know very, **well due to our rural community**.

(Looks at fourth picture.) And here is us all together…

Alice: Yes, your graduation class and A—is here! Now, you have a gold tassel. Does everyone have a gold tassel?

Joy: Yes, they just took theirs off. I just didn't have a chance to take mine off before the picture.

5. No Caption

(Another picture) Okay, that's our garden.

Alice: Now, how does the garden represent school and community to you?

Joy: The garden? Well, we had Mr.—come down and plow and show us how to use the mule and the plow. And they are going to come when we harvest it, they are going to show us how to can stuff and harvest stuff. (Looking at next picture) There's the bees.

Alice: The bees. That's new.

Joy: Yep, and they are going to try to make honey and sell that at the Festival, and they are also going to try to sell stuff from the garden like potatoes and stuff.

Alice: Talk a little bit about the Festival. The Indian Summer Festival: I've heard that mentioned quite a bit since I've been here. That's a really big deal.

Joy: It is a big deal. There is like two or three thousand people who show up out in the field. There's everything: quilt shows, boiled peanuts, army guards come, steam engines, ox and mules, cows, pigs, sheep…

Alice: Are you going to come after you graduate?

Joy: Oh yeah! I plan on coming to everything I can.

Alice: What are your plans? What do you plan to do when you finish?

Joy: I'm going to college, North Georgia.

Alice: Are you going to live at home and commute?

Joy: Yes.

Well, are there any pictures around school and community that you didn't take that you wished you did, showing connections?

Joy: Yeah. I would have taken pictures of Academic Banquet, because that shows a lot of community. Parents come out and support the kids and are there for that. Also, I was aiming to get a picture up there of the Personal Care Home when we planted those flowers for them.

Alice: Do you know most of the people up there in the Personal Care Home?

Joy: Some of them, yeah. I've been up there and know some of them, and they know me. I come up there, and they say, "Hey, Joy!" (laughs)

Alice: So do you see yourself staying in Suches for awhile?

Joy: Yes.

Alice: Why?

Joy: I don't know, just the ruralness. I don't like a big crowd. I've never been the socializer type. If someone speaks to me, then I speak to them, but usually they have to speak first.

Alice: Well, do you feel like you are prepared then if you did move to another place? Could you do that?

Joy: I could, but I wouldn't want to. I don't think I would be happy.

Alice: Um hmmm, is this who you are? Is this from going to a small school that's isolated?

Joy: It's just who I am really. I didn't say a word or talk to anybody until my tenth grade year.

Alice: What changed? What changed you?

Joy: I guess I just got tired of being run over, you know? If you don't speak up, there isn't anybody who is going to do it for you. I guess I finally learned that. I just gradually started talking.

Alice: Did that keep you from making a lot of friends, growing up?

Joy: No. I mean I would speak every now and then. But, not unless somebody asked me. Ms.--, she thought I was mute. I never said word. She would ask me something in math and I would just sit there and look at her. Because I was afraid to say it, because I was afraid that if I'm wrong, what were they going to say? That broke me in kindergarten and first grade: You don't talk. And of course, L—and J--, you know how they are, they just went along with it—yeah, she can't talk. And she thought I couldn't for a long time.

Alice: (laughing) They are little pranksters, those two are.

Joy: Yeah, they had her going for a while. Cause I wouldn't ever talk to her and tell her.

Alice: Well, I've been really impressed with how little people here just chatter. There is not a lot of chattering going on here. ..Anything else you want to add? Any other picture you would take, if you could have?

Joy: I don't know. The main thing I see is to tell you how involved we are…everyone really supports the school. Like if the school needs something, like the student council, they donate stuff or get money.

Alice: So you don't feel like you have to go outside of the community to get what you need?

Joy: Sometimes we have to, but most of the time we can get it here if the community gets word of it, they will pitch in and help.

Alice: Are you one of those community members?

Joy: Oh yeah. I am going to come back and be very involved with this school.

Alice: So if Woody Gap School wasn't here, what do you think it would be like living up here?

Joy: I don't know.

Alice: Do you come to the school during the summer?

Joy: Um hmmm, I'm here a lot in the summer.

Alice: What are you doing here, when you come here?

Joy: I come here and help them here. I mow the grass and just come down here to see what they are doing and to talk with them.

Alice: Something to do. So, do you feel drawn to the school?

Joy: Oh, yeah. For some reason (laughs)

Alice: (laughs) Well, I think anybody that's spent 13 years of their young life at one place, you've got to feel a connection.

Joy: And for so long: I'm here sometimes 18 hours a day.

Alice: You are here a lot of times when teachers are gone.

Joy: I am. And, I'm here before most of them are here.

Alice: Wow. That's because you get up at 4 in the morning.

Joy: Yeah, I'm usually here at 6:30 or 7 o'clock. And that ain't no joke!

Alice: Well, thank you. I know this has been a pain for you, so thanks a lot. It really means a lot to mean that you are contributing to this. If anybody knows what's going on, it's you!

APPENDIX G

THEMATIC ORGANIZER

4.0

Participant:____ Page:___________

Details	Big Ideas	Possible Themes

Notes: